# Croatian Journal of Philosophy

*Fact, Fiction and Narration*


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# *Introduction*

*The present issue of the* Croatian Journal of Philosophy is *dedicated to the conference* Fact, Fiction and Narration*, held in September 2021 and organized as part of the research project* Aesthetic Education through Narrative Art and Its Value for the Humanities*, funded by the Croatian Science Foundation (https://aetna.uniri.hr/). As a principal investigator, let me express my gratitude to the keynotes of the conference, Derek Matravers (The Open University), Jonathan Gilmore (The Graduate Center, CUNY), Mareike Jenner (Anglia Ruskin University) and Rafe McGregor (Edge Hill University), and all the participants. I am also grateful to my co-organizers, Mario Slugan and Joerg Fingerhut. In particular, I thank* the Croatian Journal of Philosophy *for dedicating this issue to the conference and to Tvrtko Jolić and Nenad Miščević, whose help, support and assistance were fundamental in putting this together. My co-editor, David Grčki and I would like to thank all the authors who submitted their papers and to all the reviewers whose critical comments were helpful for polishing up the final version of the papers. It is the third time that the* Croatian Journal of Philosophy *is featuring papers primarily dedicated to art, and for the first time, it focuses solely on narrative arts. We hope this collection of papers will inspire further debates on these issues.*

*Our main interest at the conference was to explore the cognitive, emotional and aesthetic modes of engagement with narratives and to probe their ontological, epistemic, moral and artistic status. This interest is evident in the papers gathered here.* Derek Matravers *reopens a decades-long debate on the nature of fiction, nonfiction and fictional truths. Beginning with Hayden White's claim that history is a form of fiction, Matravers sets out to re-examine this claim from the perspective of contemporary work on fiction and narratives. As he argues, traditional accounts of nonfiction oversimplified its nature, primarily in failing to see that all narratives, including nonfictional, are perspectival.*

Wolfgang Huemer *works within the framework of fiction in order to explore how fictional narratives enable us to engage with, and understand, the perspectives of others. Huemer uses his insights to offer additional support to the theory of aesthetic cognitivism, i.e. the view that art is cognitively valuable. He examines two ways we can understand the conception of perspective, i.e., focusing on what the world looks like from a subjective point of view, and as a method of representing. Both of these conceptions are examined in the paper, and particularly incit-*

*ing part is Huemer's analysis of the invention of linear perspective in the Renaissance.*

*The issue of narrativity is further explored from the perspectives of literary scholar* Margaret Holda *and film scholar* Enrico Terrone. *Holda proposes a hermeneutic investigation of the interactions between the art of narration and the categories of space, presence/absence, and belongingness evoked by Virginia Woolf's* Mrs. Dalloway. *Working against the background of Martin Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity, Holda analyzes narratives as means of exploration of the way we understand our lives.*

*Terrone focuses on explaining our engagement with fiction films by analyzing two of the most commonly formulated explanations of viewers' engagement with films: the thesis that the viewer of a fiction film imagines observing fictional events and the thesis that these events are imagined to be presented by a narrator. As he argues, the second thesis entails the first, but there is no entailment the other way around. Endorsing the first thesis is thus compatible with two options: endorsing the second thesis or giving it up. However, the paper argues that if we endorse the first thesis, endorsing the second provides a more compelling explanation of our engagement with and appreciation of fiction films.*

*In her contribution,* Caterina Piccione *explores the art of theater and its similarities and dissimilarities from literature. Piccione is primarily interested in examining the potential of theatric experience for development of personal identity, cognitive abilities, and emotions. At the core of her research is the notion of mimeis as developed by Walton, i.e. the problem of our imaginative engagement with the world.*

*The issue of imaginative engagements is further explored by* Daniele Molinari*, who discusses the uses of thought experiments in generating knowledge. As he argues, thought experiments, understood as props in games of make-believe, prompt social uses of imaginings. However, what is particularly interesting but almost never acknowledged by scholars working on this, are instances in which the imaginers do not endorse the conclusion proposed by the author of a thought experiment. As Molinari argues, such instances should not be dismissed; rather, they can be used for the cognitive advancement achievable through thought experiments.*

Washington Morales *sets out to examine the notion of literature, and he does so by looking at the institutional accounts of literature that focus on the notion of practice. As he argues, such an approach diminishes the role of semantics in philosophical inquiry. Taking Peter Lamarque's work as a starting point, Morales analyzes his notion of opacity and argues for the distinction between two kinds of opacity, ultimately defending textual opacity as a necessary condition for literary opacity. In this sense, Morales claims, examples in literary criticism adequately illustrate not a peripheral role of meaning in literary appreciation but the arbitrariness in interpretation, which involves semantic concerns.*

Carola Barbero *is interested in the reading experience, seeking to understand it at the level of phenomenology (including also insights from neuroscience) and by examining one's reasons to read. Analyzing the act of reading, Barbero works against Peter Kivy's analogy between reading texts and reading scores. Her primary interest, however, is in the reader and her role in understanding what is read. This understanding begins with the perceptual experience of observing black spots on paper, which develops into a multilayered imaginative experience through readers' activities.*

*In addition to these papers, the current issue also features* David Grčki's *review of Rafe McGregor's* Critical Criminology and Literary Criticism. *We hope that the papers presented will be an enjoyable and thought-provoking read!*

IRIS VIDMAR JOVANOVIĆ

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# *Non-Fictions and Narrative Truths*

DEREK MATRAVERS
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*This paper starts from the fact that the study of narrative in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy is almost exclusively the study of fictional narrative. It returns to an earlier debate in which Hayden White argued that "historiography is a form of fiction-making". Although White's claims are hyperbolical, the paper argues that he was correct to stress the importance of the claim that fiction and non-fiction use "the same techniques and strategies". A distinction is drawn between properties of narratives that are simply properties of narratives and properties of narratives that play a role in forming readers' beliefs about the world. Using this distinction, it is shown that it is an important feature of non-fictions that they are narratives; it is salutary to recognise non-fictions as being more like fictions than they are like the events they represent.*

**Keywords:** Fiction; non-fiction; Hayden White; Noël Carroll; truth; representation.

> But when you tell about life, everything changes; only it's a change nobody notices: the proof of that is that people talk about true stories. As if there could possibly be such a thing as true stories; events take place one way and we recount them the opposite way. (Sartre 1975: 62)

## 1. *Non-Fiction and Fiction*

In 1990, the year that launched contemporary philosophy of fiction, Gregory Currie announced that "There can hardly be a more important question about a piece of writing or speech than this: Is it fiction or non-fiction?" (Currie 1990: 1). Philosophers responded to this by attempting to give accounts of fiction—non-fiction being held to be relatively unproblematic. This approach to the issue has remained the orthodoxy; a

look at the titles of a recent slew of books in the area reveals where the focus lies. Currie's own recent book argues for a "deep, non-definitional connection between fiction and the imagination" (Currie 2020: 2); Catharine Abell's contribution is simply called *Fiction: A Philosophical Analysis* (Abell 2020); Jonathan Gilmore has written *Apt Imaginings: Feelings for Fiction and Other Creatures of the Mind* (Gilmore 2020). There is no comparable body of work on non-fiction.

The orthodox position has been challenged. Stacie Friend, following Kendall Walton, has long argued that the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is not what contemporary philosophy of fiction takes it to be (see, for example, (Friend 2008)).[1] In my work, I have argued that there are few, if any, philosophically interesting differences between reading fiction and reading non-fiction (Matravers 2014)). In some ways, this is a re-run of a debate from fifty years ago when the American historian, Hayden White, argued that history is a form of fiction. This paper will take another look at that debate to see if anything can be learned from it. I shall restrict my discussion, as did White, to narrative fictions and non-fictions although it is interesting to reflect on the extent to which my conclusions apply to, for example, pictures.

White made several different claims about the relation between history and fiction. I shall put to one side a set of claims, drawn from the work of Northrop Fry, which discusses different archetypal styles of writing (the mythic, romantic, scientific) and how those relate to the dominant use of different tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony) so as to affect the content of what is written—including the content of history (White 1976: 23–44). This has, I think, worn less well than some of the other claims—and, even if someone might find it worth reviving, my interest lies in his more direct assimilation of history to fiction.

White's claim seems, initially, quite startling. He states that "historiography is a form of fiction making" (White 1976: 23) and that "*All* stories are fictions which means, of course, that they can be 'true' in a metaphorical sense and in the sense in which any figure of speech can be true" (White 1989: 27). His assessment of the likely impact of this claim has, by and large, proved to be accurate.

> The characterisation of historiography as a form of fiction making is not likely to be received sympathetically by either historians or literary critics who, if they agree on little else, conventionally agree that history and fiction deal with different orders of experience and therefore represent distinct, if not opposed, forms of discourse. (White 1976: 23)

The assimilation of historiography and fiction can seem absurd; a wilful overriding of a clear and useful distinction. Whatever the philosoph-

[1] The absence of Kendall Walton from this paper might make it appear like a production of *Hamlet* without the Prince. Despite Walton's work, to my mind, being unsurpassed in the field it is unclear to me what he takes the distinction between fiction and non-fiction to be. Because of this, it is unclear to me what his view on the issues discussed would be (Walton 1990).

ical refinements we have to make, history aspires to present accurate statements about the actual world while fiction labours under no such constraint.

As so often, once one starts to look carefully, the claims being made are a less radical than they are made to appear. In his essay, "The Fictions of Factual Representation", White contrasts two views, which I shall dub 'the transparency view' and 'the narrative view'. The transparency view, White claims, emerged in the early nineteenth century.

> History came to be set over against fiction, and especially the novel, as the representation of the 'actual' to the representation of the 'possible' or only 'imaginable'. And thus was born the dream of historical discourse that would consist of nothing but factually accurate statements about a realm of events which were (or had been) observable in principle, the arrangement of which in the order of their original occurrence would permit them to figure forth in their true meaning or significance. (White 1976: 25)

By describing this as a 'dream', White clearly signals that he finds it inadequate. However, it is not immediately apparent what is wrong with it. As previously noted, unlike fictional discourse, non-fictional should consist of nothing but factually accurate statements. If a statement that is not factually accurate creeps in, the non-fiction is to that extent subject to criticism. I do not mean by this that it cannot contain propositions that are literally untrue, such as metaphors or hyperbole; we can put those to one side as simply part of the mechanism for generating true content. What I mean, rather, is that which Boswell complained of in his "Advertisement" for the first edition of his *Life of Samuel Johnson*: "I have sometimes been obliged to run half over London, in order to fix a date correctly; which, when I had accomplished, I well know would obtain me no praise, though a failure would have been to my discredit" (Boswell 1992: 3). If Boswell had claimed that Johnson had uttered a particular *bon mot* while in the *Turks Head Tavern* when in fact he had been in the *Cheshire Cheese*, he would rightly be criticised for it.

According to Noël Carroll (who wrote a careful appraisal of White's work to which this paper in indebted) Paul Ricoeur attributed to White a view which denied this obvious truth (Carroll 1990: 135).[2] However, as Carroll himself points out, this is a misreading. The relevant part of the above quotation (the 'dream' part) is that "historical discourse that would consist of *nothing but* factually accurate statements" (my italics). That is, White claims that, while there are factually accurate statements, there is more besides.

As stated above, the 'more besides' has tended to be side-lined in contemporary philosophy of fiction, which has generally viewed non-fiction as not generating particularly interesting philosophical questions. Non-fiction has been taken to be a straightforward way of transmitting

[2] The reference Carroll gives is to (Ricoeur 1984: 33–34). I have not been able to find a copy of Ricoeur's book.

belief and thus amenable to whatever theory of communication one favours. That is, it is assimilated under testimony; the writer is 'telling' the reader what they believe and, *ceteris paribus*, the reader is justified in believing what they are being told. It aims to give us unvarnished access to the way the world is—as here described by another member of the orthodoxy (albeit one that has shown some sensitivity to White's concerns).

> Simple narratives concerning real life will normally aim for high degrees of transparency of transmission, offering up facts as it were, 'unvarnished', even if the storytellers are not entirely indifferent to narrative modes. With biographies and autobiographies, it will not be uncommon for readers to attend, and be invited to attend, to the narrative vehicle. This, though, is largely dictated by broader literary concerns with fine writing and stylistic effect. Like all fact-stating discourses, biographies aim to transmit information and are primarily concerned with 'getting it right'. (Lamarque 2014: 78)

This dovetails neatly with two approaches to the definition of 'non-fiction' within recent analytic philosophy. The first focusses on the reader's view of the nature of the source—in essence, that it has not been 'made up'. David Davies has formalised this as 'the fidelity constraint':

> To read a narrative as non-fiction is to assume that the selection and temporal ordering of *all* the events making up the narrative was constrained by the desire, on the narrator's part, to be faithful to the manner in which the actual events transpired. (Davies 2007)

The second focusses on the mental states that the reader forms on the basis of what they read. Views differ in emphasis, but the core idea is, when reading non-fiction, readers believe what they read, and, when reading fiction, readers imagine or 'make-believe' what they read.[3] That is, if I read in a reputable newspaper that inflation has risen above 2% I will (if all goes well) believe that inflation has risen above 2%. If I read in Conan-Doyle's *The Red Headed League* that Mr Wilson answered a newspaper advertisement, I will not *believe* that Mr Wilson answered a newspaper advertisement, but I will (if all goes well) *make-believe* it. It is easy to see how these two definitions are related. If the reader believes that what he or she is reading is non-fiction, he or she will believe that everything in the narrative is only in the narrative because the writer believed it actually happened. Thus, provided the reader has no reason to doubt the writer's reliability, the reader should believe what they read. In short, not only is non-fiction testimony, but it is also a propitious instance of testimony in that being formally classed as non-fiction provides some assurance that the reader is not being deceived by their interlocutor. In contrast, if the reader believes that what he

[3] Philosophers such as Gregory Currie, David Davies, and Kathleen Stock take it that a proposition is fictional if the author intends by an utterance, via the usual Gricean mechanisms, that the reader make-believe a proposition (Currie 1990; Davies 2007; Stock 2017). Kendall Walton takes it that the reader is mandated to imagine a proposition on the grounds of there being an appropriate prop in a game of make-believe (Walton 1990).

or she is reading is fiction, he or she will not believe that everything in the narrative is only in the narrative because the writer believed it actually happened. Thus, the fact that a fictional narrative claim such-and-such provides the reader with no reason to believe such-and-such. Instead, the reader adopts a different attitude: he or she imagines (or make-believes) it.

This picture is not as neat as I have painted it. As I indicated above, there are elements of even reliable non-fictional works that are not 'faithful to the manner in which the actual events transpired' because the writer did not believe they reported literal truths: metaphors, speculations, counterfactual reasoning, and other flights of fancy. This can be dealt with by some caveat suggesting that these devices are only there in the service of conveying reliable beliefs. In addition, there are elements of even the most outré fictional works that not only are true, but that the author intends us to believe. This could be dealt with in various ways, including seeing narratives as a 'patchwork' of fiction and non-fiction. Furthermore, as stated above, there have been more fundamental criticisms from myself and from Stacie Friend. Debate over these issues has occupied, and continues to occupy, those who write on these matters. However, for current purposes, I only want to set up this view of non-fiction in order to see what White thinks is wrong with it.

White's point emerges once we counterpose the transparency view with the narrative view.

> What should interest us in the discussion of 'the literature of fact' or, as I have chosen to call it, 'the fictions of factual representation' is the extent to which the discourse of the historian and the writer of imaginative fictions overlap, resemble, or correspond with each other. Although historians and writers of fiction may be interested in different kinds of events, both the forms of their respective discourses and their aims in writing are often the same. In addition, in my view, the techniques and strategies they use in the composition of their discourses can be shown to be substantially the same, however different they may appear on a purely surface, or dictional, level of their texts. (White 1976: 21)

White seems to be making two claims. First, that "the discourse of the historian and the writer of imaginative fictions overlap, resemble, or correspond with each other", and, secondly, that both history and fiction use the "same techniques and strategies". Taking the points in reverse order, White is claiming that both historians and writers of fiction are employing the techniques and strategies characteristic of producing narratives and, as a result, what each produce resembles and corresponds to the other with respect to being narrative. This twofold claim seems both true and important, and, despite White's work, does not carry sufficient weight in the current debate.

To substantiate White's claim, we would have to show that it is constitutive of a representation being in narrative form that it gives the representation some epistemologically interesting property over and above the truth value of the propositions that make up its content.

White cites the following passage from Louis O. Mink with approval (this passage is quoted in (White 1987a: 46)).

> One can regard any text in direct discourse as a logical conjunction of assertions. The truth-value of the text is then simply a logical function of the truth or falsity of the individual assertions taken separately: the conjunction is true if and only if each of the propositions is true. Narrative has in fact been analysed, especially by philosophers intent on comparing the form of the narrative with the form of theories as if it were nothing but a logical conjunction of past-referring statements; and on such an analysis there is no problem of *narrative truth*. The difficulty with the model of logical conjunction, however, is that it is not a model of narrative at all. It is rather a model of a chronicle. … It should be clear that a historical narrative claims truth not merely for each of its individual statements taken distributively, but for the complex form of the narrative itself. (Mink 1978: 143–44)

It is 'the complex form of the narrative itself' that Mink claims is epistemologically interesting. He bases this on the claim that a narrative has, as part of its content, truths that are over and above the truths of individual proposition contained therein—what he calls 'narrative truth'.

## 2. *Narrative*

Let us first stipulate some terminology. Following Davies, I will call some episode, of a reasonable duration, that has a certain unity to it, an 'event'. Thus, for example, the Battle of Waterloo is an event. I shall call the various happenings, of a shorter duration, that make up an event, 'incidents'. Thus, to stay with our example, Lord Paget losing his leg, the closing of the gates at Hougoumont, the charge of the Scots Greys, and the retreat of the Old Guard, are all incidents. However, incidents do not need to be notable; the death of some forgotten soldier, a visit to the privy by a French officer, and some cavalry horse farting, are also incidents. There are various ways in which a description of this event could be constructed. An annal would merely list various of the incidents, one after the other. A chronicle is richer in structure than an annal, but no attempt would be made to link the various events into one overarching story.[4] Richer still is a narrative. Peter Goldie presents us with a nice definition:

> A narrative is a representation of events which is shaped, organised and coloured, presenting those events, and the people involved in them, from a certain perspective or perspectives, and thereby giving narrative structure—coherence, meaningfulness, and evaluative and emotional import, to what is narrated. (Goldie 2012: 8)

For Goldie, it is a defining property of narrative that it presents events from "a certain perspective or perspectives". What does this mean?

Goldie himself breaks the perspective into three elements. A nar-

[4] White himself contributed much to the discussion as to what is distinctive of narrative rather an annal or a chronicle (White 1987b).

rative is coherent, in that it reveals "connections between the related events, and it does so in a way that a mere list or annal, or chronicle, does not". The second element is internal meaningfulness; that is, "making sense of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of people who are internal to the narrative". Finally, there is evaluative and emotional import: "things matter to people, and a narrative involving people can capture the way things matter to them" (Goldie 2012: 14–25). In short, in constructing a narrative, narrators will impose some form on the sequence of incidents.

We are now in a position, I think, to give a diagnosis of White's two claims and the nature of his opponents' disagreement. It all turns on the relation between three things: a fictional narrative, a non-fictional narrative, and the event as it actually happened. White's two claims were as follows: that "the discourse of the historian and the writer of imaginative fictions overlap, resemble, or correspond with each other", and, that both history and fiction use the "same techniques and strategies". Again, taking them in reverse order, the second claim is that a non-fictional narrative represents the event differently to how it actually happened; and the first claim is that (therefore) non-fictional narratives can be assimilated to fictional narratives (in that they do not track the truth).

White's interlocutors have tended to skip past the second claim, which, as I have reconstructed his argument, is the grounds for the first. Instead, their counterarguments have focussed directly on the first claim: that non-fictional narratives do not track the truth. Here is Andrew Norman:

> Of course historians select their facts and obviously the stories they tell are incomplete. But by itself this does not mean that the result is distorted or false. To say so is to posit implicitly an evaluative ideal of a history that is complete and non-perspectival. But this is incoherent. I have never read a history that claimed perfect objectivity or completeness, nor do I expect to. (Norman 1991: 132)

Noël Carroll has made a similar point:

> Narratives are a form of representation, and, in that sense, they are invented, but that does not preclude their capacity to provide accurate information. Narratives can provide accurate knowledge about the past in term of the kinds of features they track, namely, the ingredients of *courses of events*, which include: background conditions, causes and effects, as well as social context, the logic of situations, practical deliberations, and ensuing actions. (Carroll 1990: 142)

These rebuttals are sufficient to block the first claim: that is, the fact that both non-fiction and fiction both have narrative form does not entail that non-fictions cannot convey accurate information about the world. To that extent the orthodox view, that non-fiction is testimony, survives. However, and this is my main claim in this paper, there is still much to be learned from the second claim: that both history and fiction use the 'same techniques and strategies'. In particular, the fact

that history uses these techniques and strategies makes it the case that it does not give us 'transparent access' to reality—the orthodox view oversimplifies the nature of non-fiction.

Let us begin with an elucidation of the second claim from White.

> What I have sought to suggest is that this value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary. The notion that sequences of real events possess the formal attributes of stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origin in wishes, day dreams, reveries. Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see 'the end' in every beginning? (White 1987b: 25)

The point here seems to be that narrative representations of actual events exhibit properties of narrative (such as coherence, internal meaning, evaluative and emotional import, and selection) and these are not features of the actual event. This full import of this claim—that a non-fictional narrative represents an event differently to how it actually transpired—is not dealt with by Norman and Carroll's replies (as we shall see, Carroll does attempt to black this claim later in his paper—an attempt, I shall claim, which is unsuccessful). Our access to events that are not present to us, either because they are distant in space or in time or both, is via representations. We grasp these events in the way they are represented to us. Hence, the nature of that representation will affect the nature of that grasp. In particular, the nature of narrative will affect the nature of that grasp. This point, which seems to me important and worth discussing, is largely ignored in the contemporary philosophy of fiction and narrative.[5]

Events themselves just happen. They do not have coherence, internal meaningfulness, and evaluative and emotional import. What difference does it make if we encounter these events via a narrative? In the quotation above, White claims that properties of the representation (the narrative) are attributed to the event that it represented. That is, he claims that narratives represent events as having "the formal attributes of stories". This is too quick; such a claim cannot be made without further argument. We cannot assume that representations represent events as possessing the properties of those representations. A black and white photograph may represent a wedding, but it does not represent the wedding as being in black and white; it represents it as being in all the colours the event was actually in.

[5] Kendall Walton stressed that the salient contrast for those interested in fiction is between two sorts of representation, not between a representation and the world: "Our present concern is not with 'fiction' as opposed to 'reality' nor with contrasts between 'fiction' and 'fact' or 'truth' … The difference we are interested in is between *works of fiction* and *works of non-fiction*. The potential for confusion here is considerable and has been amply realised" (Walton 1990: 73). Our sub-field would look very different had due attention been paid to his advice in this matter.

Although White was wrong to make that assumption, sometimes representations *do* represent events as possessing the properties of those representations. Indeed, this generally seems to be the case. Consider once again the narrative describing the Battle of Waterloo and Goldie's three properties of narrative. There are at least two ways in which *coherence* could be achieved (there may be more). The first is that narratives frequently explain incidents by citing their causes: the formation of the British infantry into squares is explained by the attacks by French cavalry, plus the background in information that forming squares was the standard infantry response to attacks by cavalry. The second is by the unfolding of plans. Napoleon's strategy was to keep his best troops in reserve until he sensed a weakening in his opponent's line, after which we would commit them. That explains why the remaining ten battalions of the Guard advanced when they did (the rest having been committed earlier to hold off the Prussians). The fact that the course of the battle can be explained represents the event as being a coherent set of incidents rather than a set of incidents that happen at random. Such causal connections, and working out of plans, were part of the actual event, hence the narrative is correct to represent it as such.

The same could be true in a representation representing an event as *meaningful*. As the event in our example is a battle, rather than an event focussed on a small number of individual actors, the salient 'meaning' is not so much Goldie's 'internal meaning' ("making sense of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of people who are internal to the narrative") but historical meaning: the battle was such that it brought about an abrupt change in the passage of events. The Battle of Waterloo did so in several respects. It was the end of the Napoleonic wars that had dogged Europe since 1803, and it precipitated the Congress of Vienna which laid the foundations for the modern nation state. It also brought about the change to modern warfare; large numbers of men, dressed in highly coloured uniforms, and exposed to modern military weapons, was no longer an option. A narrative can represent the battle has having these properties. Of course, White is right that such properties do not "present themselves to perception" (in that they could not literally be seen by someone present at the battle) but that is hardly relevant. Whether that is true or not (a theory of perception that allowed rich perceptual contents may well accommodate such properties) does not belie that fact that the event itself, the battle, possessed such properties.

White asks rhetorically "Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends?" Again, whether it is "presented to perception" is beside the point; events have many properties that may not be detected by sight at the time. As to the question whether they have beginnings, middles, and ends, that could be interpreted as an empiri-

cal claim: was there an incident of which it makes sense to say it began the battle (say, approach of the French cavalry to the Eastern flank at 11.00am on the 18th June) and an incident of which is it true to say that it ended the battle (say, the retreat of the Guard)? It is worth noting that Napoleon himself seemed to think the event itself had these properties of narrative:

> A battle is a dramatic action that has its commencement, its middle and its end. The order of battle taken by the two armies, and the first movements to come to action, constitute the prelude. The contre movements of the attacked army forms the plot. This causes new dispositions, brings on the crisis, and whence springs the result. (From Napoleon's *Memoirs*, quoted in (Clayton 2015: 363)

I have more to say on this matter below.

Goldie's third set of properties were those that fell under "*evaluative and emotional import*": "things matter to people, and a narrative involving people can capture the way things matter to them". Once again, it will be a property of the event itself that it deserved to be, and was, the object of evaluations and emotions including admiration and sadness. A narrative can bring this out by describing the properties of the battle that showed that it merited such reactions (the astonishing bravery of soldiers on all sides) and that it did elicit such reactions (from the families of those among the 40 000 dead).

Is there anything left of White's claim that the way a representation represents an event is different to how it actually transpired? I think there is. We have not yet considered the full import of Goldie's fundamental point about narratives: that they present events from "a certain perspective or perspectives". Goldie means 'perspective' in a "metaphorical, evaluative sense". That is, a sense in which the perspectives of two people might differ, in that an action that might seem reasonable from one perspective might seem "thoroughly unreasonable" from another (Goldie 2012: 12). This gives us a new way to frame White's challenge. The properties of the representation that are attributed to the event being represented are such that they embody a perspective, and the attribution might seem reasonable from one perspective and unreasonable from another. Hence, a narrative of an event will not present that event in a neutral (that is, universally acceptable) way. Events themselves just happen; but narrative representations of events necessarily come as a stacked deck.

In their rejoinders to White, Norman and Carroll appear to have this in mind. Norman is happy that non-fiction is perspectival (or, at least, he claims never to have read a history that is 'non-perspectival'). To remind ourselves, Carroll says "Narratives can provide accurate knowledge about the past in term of the kinds of features they track, namely, the ingredients of *courses of events*, which include: background conditions, causes and effects, as well as social context, the logic of situations, practical deliberations, and ensuing actions". Consider the properties that we have claimed a narrative of the Battle of Waterloo

attributes to that event: that various incidents stand in causal relations; that the battle marked an abrupt change in the passage of events; and that it was both an apt object, and in fact an object, of evaluation and emotion. Norman and Carroll seem to be saying that whether the Battle of Waterloo really possessed these properties is a matter of fact. That is, they are saying that claim that the British formed squares as a reaction to attacks by French cavalry is assessable as true or false (and so on for the rest of our examples). This seems correct; at least, if an historian says that the Battle of Waterloo did not, say, precipitate the Congress of Vienna he or she will be in factual dispute with those historians who claim that it did.

What of the claim that the battle has "a proper beginning, middle, and end"? Here White seems on stronger ground; what began and ended the battle does not seem a matter of fact but of interpretation. There seem to be two replies open to White's opponents (each of the answers might be appropriate in different circumstances). The first is that, although the narrative has a beginning, middle and end, the narrative *does not* represent the event as having these properties (analogously to the photograph not representing the wedding as being in black and white). The narrative must begin somewhere and let us say it begins with the French cavalry approaching Wellington's Eastern flank. The narrative can begin in this way without representing the battle having begun with this incident. The second reply is that the narrative *does* represent the battle as having these properties. The obvious way to interpret such a claim is that the author is claiming that the battle is 'best thought of' in this way; that taking such incidents to be the beginning and the end of the battle is the most illuminating way to think of it. Such a claim would be perspectival, and context-dependent in that whether it *is* the most illuminating way to think of the battle would depend on the author's broader explanatory purposes. Once again, however, this does not seem to support White's thesis: whether it is illuminating to think of such an incident as the beginning of the battle, and such an incident as its end, seems to be a claim *about the battle* that historians can (and do) dispute.

So far, then, we have not found anything to support White's claim that a non-fictional narrative represents the event differently to how it actually happened. However, the properties of narrative that may, or may not, be attributed to the event being represented we have considered does not exhaust the list of relevant properties of narrative. A further, obvious point is that a narrative of some event will include reference to some incidents but not to others.[6] Indeed, on any plausible method of counting incidents, it will omit most of them. A narrative of the Battle of Waterloo is likely to include the closing of the gates at Hougoumont, the great cavalry charges, and the retreat of the Old

[6] I say "further", although Goldie would almost certainly have included this feature under one or more of the aspects he mentions.

Guard. However, it is unlikely to include the less notable incidents I enumerated earlier: the death of some forgotten soldier, a visit to the privy by a French officer, and some cavalry horse farting. This matters because the perspective embodied in a narrative will, in part, be constructed by the selection of incidents to be included in the narrative. To be clear, it is no part of my claim that selection is the *only* additional feature of narrative that can be used to construct a perspective; there are others, including the examination of motives (part of Goldie's 'internal meaning') and whether certain personality traits are put in the foreground or in the background.[7] However, for the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the selection and omission of incidents.

Consider, for example, Richard Attenborough's highly acclaimed film charting the life of Gandhi (Attenborough 1982). The perspective embodied in the film presents Gandhi as a humane man; someone committed to the value and dignity of human life—even the lives of his political opponents. To this end, Attenborough (or John Briley, who wrote the screenplay), included incidents such as the non-violent protests in South Africa, the 'salt march', and Gandhi's valiant attempts to prevent violence between Hindus and Muslims in the run up to partition. Amongst the incidents they chose to omit were Gandhi's pronouncements about the relative importance of Asian people over Black people. Speaking in Bombay in 1896 of the position of South Africans of Indian extraction, Gandhi said "Ours is one continual struggle against a degradation sought to be inflicted upon us by the Europeans, who desire to degrade us to the level of the raw kaffir whose occupation is hunting, and whose sole ambition is to collect a certain number of cattle to buy a wife with and then pass his life in indolence and nakedness". Nor was this an isolated expression of such a view; a raft of similar pronouncements is documented.

The point is not to accuse Attenborough and Briley of being duplicitous by representing Gandhi in a partial or sanitized way. Such a claim would run counter to the thesis of this paper, which is that narratives are *essentially* perspectival. Attenborough and Briley had to choose their perspective, and they chose to represent Gandhi in a certain way—as a towering moral figure. Consider an analogy. Red House was designed and built by William Morris and Philip Webb, decorated by Morris and Burne-Jones, and was the site of the foundation of Morris and Co., and the development of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Between Morris moving out in 1866 and it being taken over by the UK National Trust (a conservation body) in 2003 it was lived in by private owners. When the National Trust took over, they needed to decide how to 'present' the house to the public: did they strip out the post-Morris decoration, or did they keep it in situ? They could not keep everything and present a coherent experience. After much adjudication, they de-

[7] I hope to explore this in further work.

cided to return the house to how it was in Morris's time.[8] In both cases there is a judgement as to how to represent the subject and, in each case, this was not the only perspective that could have been taken.

There are those who feel that the pernicious legacy of the kind of views that Gandhi expressed on black Africans makes those views too important not to include; there are also those who feel that the modern obsession with 'heritage' leads us to systematically underestimate the artistic and decorative contribution of our own age and our recent past. In short, selection (I reiterate, not only selection) can help build a perspective that is only one of a number of possible perspectives a narrative could embody. That is, there are any number of ways of representing events (whether Gandhi's life, or the history of Red House) and how it is represented is partly a matter of selection—an essential feature of narrative. We do seem to have found grounds to support White's claim that a non-fictional narrative in some way gets between the reader and how the event actually transpired (which, by definition, includes all the incidents).

In the paper mentioned earlier, Noël Carroll rejects this conclusion.[9] He claims that in addition to the individual claims being true, an historical account "must also meet various standards of objectivity". He goes on to claim that "a historical narrative should be comprehensive; it should incorporate all those events that previous research has identified to be germane to the subject that the historian is seeking to illuminate". He glosses that point with the following paragraph.

> Obviously, the selective procedures that historians respect in composing their narratives will be evaluated in terms of all sorts of rational standards, like comprehensiveness, that do not correspond to anything found in the past. However, this does not mean that the selections and deletions in a historical narrative are divorced from literal questions of truth and falsity. For the selections and deletions are assessed in terms of those sorts of standards that experience indicates reliably track the truth. (Carroll 1990: 155)

I do not find this paragraph easy to understand. By 'comprehensiveness', Carroll clearly does not mean to embrace the absurdity of representing an event by (comprehensively) representing every incident in it—he is happy to allow that there will be 'selections and deletions'. However, he does hold that such selections and deletions will be governed by rational standards; some selections and deletions will be a falling away from rationality and others will not. I assume that what Carroll means here is instrumental rationality—it is difficult to see any other candidate. That is, certain patterns of selection and deletion will be irrational in that they do not serve to advance us towards some chosen end. However, what chosen end? The answer Carroll gives us is the end of conveying the truth about the event.

[8] Thanks to Jeremy Musson (who was involved in the decision-making) for talking through this point with me.

[9] Although oddly, as it is surely Mink's and White's major point, the discussion is relegated to the final page and a half of a 35-page paper.

Let us grant to Carroll that a regulative ideal of non-fictional narratives is to convey an adequate conception of an event (let us leave it open for the moment as to whether 'an adequate conception of an event' is equivalent to 'the truth about an event'). There are ways in which this can fail: the author may fail unwittingly through absence of information or incompetence, or he or she may deliberately mislead by not mentioning incidents that merit a mention. Carroll's example, namely, that "a narrative of the outbreak of the American revolution that failed to recount the debates over taxation" will be "inadequate", could be an instance of either of these (Carroll 1990: 155). However, these are not the cases that concern us. Rather, it is in the nature of narrative that the authors of two different narratives, who make different decisions with respect to selections and deletions, can both convey an adequate conception of an event. If so, then we cannot compare these authorial decisions against each other in terms of rationality. There can be two (or more) non-fictional narratives of the same event, both adequate, that convey a very different impression of that event. In polemical moods, White claims that this shows that non-fictions and fictions are epistemologically on a par. Carroll and Norman are correct to point out that this does not follow. However, they miss the less polemical point: the narrative properties of non-fictions mean that they can stand between us and events in interesting ways.

## 3. *Conclusion*

The return to White's discussion has shown us that there is, necessarily, a difference between the way in which a narrative represents an event and that event. This reinforces the much-neglected point that the (so-called) philosophy of fiction errs when it uses conclusions that stem from contrasting fiction and events to characterise the contrast between fictions and non-fictions. Despite his fondness for polemic, White's point is fundamentally sound. It is an important feature of non-fictions that they are narratives; it is salutary to think of non-fictions as being in some respects more like fictions than they are like the events they represent.

Failure to grasp this point has important consequences. It has spawned a shoal of red herrings, including 'the paradox of fiction', problems around 'imaginative resistance', and problems around 'sympathy with the devil'.[10] However, there are other consequences as well of which I will mention only two. First, philosophical work on testimony has focussed on the transmission of beliefs via a single sentence. This entirely neglects the usual case, which is the transmission of perspective via a narrative; something which brings a great deal of complexity in its train. This has been taken up recently by Rachel Fraser, in an article that is consonant with the claims made in this paper (Fraser

[10] I add some detail to this promissory note in (Matravers 2014).

2021). Secondly, as we have seen, perspectives may be disputed; for example, critics might feel that Attenborough and Briley took the wrong perspective. That is, or so their accusers maintain, their narrative—while accurate in every included detail—is misleading. This accusation does not necessarily depend on Attenborough and Briley's intentions. Their not including an incident might simply be because they were unaware of it; or they might have been aware of it but judged that omitting such an incident gave a more 'truthful' perspective overall. Once again, these issues are only now beginning to be explored (see, for example, (Barber 2020; Camp 2018)). We can only hope that with this, and other work, the neglect of non-fiction as a narrative form will soon be a thing of the past.[11]

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# *Fictional Narrative and the Other's Perspective*

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*Anti-cognitivism is best understood as a challenge to explain how works of fictional narrative can add to our worldly knowledge. One way to respond to this challenge is to argue that works of fictional narrative add to our knowledge by inviting us to explore, in the imagination, the perspectives or points of view of others. In the present paper, I distinguish two readings of this thesis that reflect two very different conceptions of "perspective": a first understanding focuses on what the world looks like from a subjective point of view. Within this framework, we can distinguish approaches that focus on the subjective character of experience from others that explore the nature of subjectivity. I will argue that both strands can be successful only if they acknowledge the* de se *character of imagining. The second conception understands perspective as a method of representing. To illustrate it, I will look back to the invention of linear perspective in Renaissance painting. I will argue that the definition of perspective as a rule-guided method or technique can shed new light on the thesis that works of narrative fiction are particularly suited to display other perspectives.*

**Keywords:** Imagination; perspective; point of view; empathy; subjective experience; cognitive value of literature; social practice.

## 1. *The anti-cognitivist challenge*

The attitude prominent philosophers have taken towards works of literary fiction throughout the history is characterized by a curious tension: on the one hand, there is a long tradition of those who appreciate fictional narrative for its potential to add to our knowledge and to widen our cognitive horizons. Works of fiction, they suggest,

contain detailed and colorful representations of particular events and characters that are easily accessible to the reader. These events and characters are creatures of the author's imagination, but the way they are portrayed and interwoven with one another adds up to a narrative plot, which guides the readers' attention and enables them to discern distinct patterns or principles in the story that come to illustrate more general worldly truths. In this way, it is argued, narrative fiction allows the readers to grasp the universal in the particular.[1]

This optimistic outlook is contrasted with the more skeptical stance of anti-cognitivist philosophers, who argue that the primary function of works of literary fiction is an aesthetic one: literary works of art are supposed to arouse aesthetic experiences in the reader; they serve to *entertain*, not to *educate* the audience. Philosophers in this tradition often insist that the descriptions contained in works of fiction are not literally true and that authors of such works do not commit to the truth of the assertions they make, nor do they provide arguments or evidence for them.[2] Radical versions of literary anti-cognitivism, like the one proposed by Jerome Stolnitz (1992), have gone so far to suggest that works of fiction could not possibly impart relevant knowledge to the readers.[3]

Literary anti-cognitivism, at least in its radical version, has not found many advocates among philosophers who contribute to the philosophy of literature. One might suggest, however, that this merely unveils a widespread *bias*: most philosophers who reflect on the nature of literary fiction tend to have a strong, genuine interest for literature in the first place and typically take it for granted that works of literary fiction can and, in fact, often do widen our cognitive horizons. Even if this suspicion is correct, we can note, however, that their bias does not make them blind. They are still philosophers who can appreciate the strength of a simple and convincing argument, even when they do not share the conclusion—and the anti-cognitivist line of reasoning is, at least *prima facie*, quite convincing. It moves from two premises that

[1] A very early, often quoted expression of this view can be found in Aristotle's *Poetics*: The difference between the historian and the poet, according to Aristotle, is that "the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do—which is the aim of poetry, though it affixes proper names to the characters" (Aristotle 1962: chaps. 9, 1451b).

[2] I am echoing here the characterization of anti-cognitivism that has been provided by Noël Carroll in his (2002).

[3] A radical anti-cognitivist position is expressed—yet often only in side-remarks—by many philosophers in the past, from Plato (*Republic X*, 598 ff.: 607 f) and David Hume (1978: 121) to Bertrand Russell (1940: 294), and argued in more detail by Stolnitz (1992). More moderate forms of anti-cognitivism suggest that the cognitive value does not add to the aesthetic value of a literary work of art and that the former is at best a by-product, a collateral benefit, as it were, but in no way of central importance in literature (cf., for example, Diffey 1995; Lamarque 2006).

seem unproblematic: (*i*) in a literal sense, there is no truth in fiction; in fact, works of fiction do not contain (nor do they pretend to contain) faithful representations of reality. Moreover, (*ii*) it is difficult to see how representations that are systematically false could directly add to our knowledge or improve our understanding of reality.

In short, a look at the debate in recent philosophy of literature shows that the anti-cognitivist line of reasoning has impressed many philosophers, but has failed to convince them. If this analysis is correct, the merit of radical literary anti-cognitivism is not that of shedding an interesting light on the nature of literary fiction; but rather in having presented a challenge that has spurred an intensive debate in philosophy of literature in the last three decades.[4] Most importantly, the *anti-cognitivist challenge* has stimulated several philosophers to react and formulate a detailed proposal of *how exactly* works of fictional narrative can impart relevant (worldly) knowledge to their readers and add to their understanding of reality.

## 2. *Perspective as subjective experience from a point of view*

Over the years, several different strategies have been proposed.[5] They should not be seen as rivals; after all, literature is a very heterogeneous and multifarious phenomenon, and some accounts might work well with some forms of literature, others with others. One line of reasoning, on which I will focus in the present article, suggests that the cognitive value of fictional narrative lies in its potential to illustrate *what the world looks like* from another person's perspective or from a different point of view. With their detailed descriptions of particular events and characters, it is argued, works of fictional narrative are particularly suited to show *how things are like* for a person in a certain situation or with a distinct cultural, social, historical, biographical, or experiential background etc.—which can be particularly instructive for readers who are not (yet) familiar with the respective situation or background.

Let me note right away that the expression "what the world looks like from a certain point of view" can be read in different ways. It can refer to an aspect that is tied to how one subjectively experiences the world on the one hand or to a method or technique of representing, on the other. I will discuss the first point in this, the second in the subsequent sections. When focusing on the former reading that ties perspective to subjective experience, we can again distinguish two poles: (*i*) in one understanding, it refers to the fact that one and the same object or scenario might look different from a different point of view or that one

[4] The idea that anti-cognitivism should best seen as a challenge is suggested also by Phelan (2021: 37f).

[5] For an overview of the debate, cf. Gibson (2008), Mikkonen (2013) or Harold (2016).

and the same course of events might "feel differently", that is, cause experiences of different qualitative character, for persons of different backgrounds. The expression "point of view", in these contexts, is typically not taken literally as denoting the *physical location* of a person or fictional character; it rather stands for the set of beliefs, feelings, judgments, past experiences, the character and the dispositions to act that form the background in front of which the (described) experience is taking place and that determine not only the content of experience, but (at least to some extent) also what it is like having it. Works of fictional narrative can, of course, not add to the readers' phenomenal knowledge in Frank Jackson's sense (cf. Jackson 1982; 1986); it cannot transmit the distinctive qualitative character of an experience, which is ineffable, to the audience. A person, who has never eaten a pineapple will not find out what an ananas tastes like by reading a novel or watching a movie. It has been argued, however, that there is a distinctive form of knowledge one can acquire by living through an experience (cf. Walsh 1969; 1970) and that with their detailed descriptions of the relevant experiences—which does not substitute the experience, but can allow the reader to relate to it (Wilson 1983; Schildknecht 2014)—works of fictional narrative can communicate this knowledge to readers who have not (yet) made the relevant experience by themselves.

While this first reading of the expression focuses on the experiential aspect of "subjective experience", (*ii*) a second reading underlines the fact that it is always a *subject* who makes the relevant experience. Points of view, it is argued, have an irreducible subjective element. When it comes to propositional knowledge, on the other hand, we typically aim at objectivity. This is most evident in the natural sciences that strive for acquiring ever more objective knowledge. Scientists are not particularly interested in describing what things look or feel like from a certain point of view; they rather aim at unveiling the "true nature" of things; they abstract, as much as possible, from all subjective elements of experience in order to establish truths that are intersubjectively valid. Works of narrative fiction, on the other hand, which give detailed representations of particular events and characters, are particularly apt to perform an "investigation into the subjective nature of experience", which could, "counterbalance scientific investigation into the objective nature of the real" (Burri 2007: 316). They are, thus, particularly useful when it comes to imaginatively explore the very nature of the subjective point of view, the "view from self" (Burri 2007: 310) or the "subjective perspectives other than our own" (Donnelly 2019: 13).

So far, we have discussed the view that works of literary fiction can make us familiar with the perspective of others by shedding light on the nature of subjective experience of a concrete, yet fictional person in concrete, yet fictional situations or circumstances. We have seen that such investigations can take two forms, depending on whether it focuses on the experiential dimension or on the nature of subjectivity. The

former sensibilizes us to the fact that things can look quite differently when seen from a different point of view. It suggests that the quality of experience is (at least in part) determined the "general outlook" a person has on things, i.e., by her beliefs, desires, emotions, past experiences, and dispositions to act, but also by her character or her cultural, social, historical, or biographical background. The latter helps us to appreciate that these experiences are made by a subject, a single focal point in which a series of experiences converge. Moreover, it draws our attention at how a subject is constituted by these experiences and so teaches us to respect the other's individual choices and judgments as expressions of their subjective point of view.

Both lines of reasoning suggest that works of narrative fiction are particularly suited to communicate this form of knowledge—not only because they describe particular events and characters, but also because they have an aesthetic quality that attracts the attention of the audience and invites them to engage in imaginative activities and immerse in fictional worlds or, to put it in Walton's terms, to take part in games of make-believe. In this context, an aspect of imagination that is highlighted by Walton proves important: imagination has always a *de se* component. Participants, who take part in games of make believe, imagine the scenarios prescribed by the work, but they do not imagine them from a "point of nowhere". They are always somehow present in their fantasies. This can take different forms. At times, one might identify with one of the protagonists and imagine what it is like to live through the experiences described "from the inside", as it were. In other moments, one might imagine simply observing the events from a bystander's point of view. Moreover, even a reader who is completely immersed in the events described is still aware that it is her who is imagining the respective scenarios; "the minimal self-imagining that seems to accompany all imagining is that of being aware of whatever else it is that one imagines" (Walton 1990: 29).

The *de se* character of imagination can explain not only how it is possible and why so many readers have the strong inclination to completely immerse in worlds of fiction, but also how fictional narrative can add to our understanding of the perspectives of others. In the game of make-believe, we become (in some way) part of the world of fiction, which allows us to relate to the subjects and events that are represented in the work. It is this form of first-person participation what makes genuine encounters with the fictional character possible—encounters, to be sure, that take place not in reality, but within the world of fiction.[6]

> In order to understand how minorities feel about being discriminated against, one should imagine not just instances of discrimination but instances of discrimination against *oneself;* one should imagine *experiencing* discrimination. It is when I imagine *myself* in another's shoes (whether or

[6] These are not isolated encounters, but ones that are part of a (rule-guided) social practice one shares with others. I discuss this point in Huemer (2021).

> not I imagine *being* him) that my imagination helps me to understand *him*. … And when I imagine this I also learn about myself. (Walton 1990: 34)

This shows that works of fictional narrative can enrich our understanding of another's point of view—both with regards to its experiential quality and its subjective character—only when it succeeds in engaging the audience in participating in a game of make-believe that requires them to have *de se* imaginings of the scenarios described.

The cognitivist line of reasoning that I have sketched so far can suggest that not only imagination, but also empathy plays a central role when we read or watch works of fictional narrative. In fact, several authors have explicitly endorsed that empathy plays a relevant role in our understanding of fictional characters and in our appreciation of works of fictional narrative (cf., for example, Feagin 1996; Donnelly 2019; Gibson 2015; Vendrell Ferran 2018, 2021). This can enrich our cognitive horizons in two ways: on the one hand, we can transform our deepened understanding of the perspective of the (fictional) characters to that of real persons who live in conditions similar to theirs or actually have made experiences that are comparable to the events represented in the work.[7] Apart from that, engaging with works of fiction can also add to our *know-how* by training our empathic capacities which, in turn, allow us to better understand the persons we encounter in real life.[8]

This line of reasoning is one way of spelling out the thesis that works of narrative fiction can add to our knowledge by illustrating the perspectives of others. In the next sections, I want to present a quite different, less "personalized" interpretation of this thesis, according to which one's perspective does not primarily depend on the point of view one adopts when representing a certain scenario, but rather on the techniques one applies when doing the representing. According to this conception, perspective is not a position (spatial or other) one adopts, but rather a method one applies when describing relevant bits of reality.

## 3. *Perspective as a method or technique*

The term "perspective" is an umbrella-concept that spans over a whole range of different uses in very different contexts. There is no clear and univocal definition, nor is there a shared set of characteristics that could serve to pin down the meaning of the term; there is but a vague

[7] This, of course, does not guarantee that the understanding is true or accurate. Talented authors can bring their readers to adopt distorted views or enforce false prejudices towards persons of a certain background. This should not come as a surprise; the manipulative power of fiction was already noted by Plato (*Republic III:* 387[b]). It merely underlines that the cognitive value of works of fiction lies in their potential to add to the beliefs of the audience. Like all human beings, however, authors are fallible and so there is not guarantee that the beliefs that are offered by the work are, in fact, true.

[8] There is empirical evidence that engaging with fiction does, in fact, enhance one's ability to understand others' thoughts and feeling, cf. Kidd and Castano (2013; 2017) discussed in Donnelly (2019).

family resemblance that holds between the various instances of the term (cf. Van Fraassen 2008: 59). In the present section, I will discuss a prominent use of "perspective" that is quite distinct from the one discussed in the previous section.

When one tries to spell out the thesis that (many) works of narrative fiction invite us to imagine the perspectives of others, one can notice that there is a process / product ambiguity: the term "perspective" can refer either to a feature that is manifest in the representation or to a certain technique or a method of representing.

(*i*) When we use the term in the former sense, we refer to an aspect that is present in the product of our representational activities. This is the meaning we have in mind when we say that in a painting, an object or a scenario is shown *from a certain perspective*—or that the way in which characters or events are described in a novel makes a certain *point of view* manifest. In both cases, we refer to the relative position the author has taken towards the object. Saying of a representation that it is perspectival in this sense means, accordingly, that relevant features of the representation depend on the representer's "point of view", i.e., on the relation (spatial or other) she has assumed towards the object. This is the sense of "perspective" as we have discussed it in the preceding section.

We should note that the terms "relative position" or "point of view" can, but do not need to express a *spatial* relation. As I have mentioned in the preceding section, an author's point of view—the way she sees the world—is determined not only by her location in space, but also by her beliefs and desires, her feelings and emotions, her judgments and past experiences, her character and dispositions to act, etc. All these aspects have an impact on how a given object or scenario is depicted or described in a work of fictional narrative. It is this sense of perspective philosophers have in mind when they suggest that imagining another person's perspective consists in taking on "the perspective I would have on things if I believed something I actually don't believe" (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002: 1) or in the attempt to "place ourselves, in imagination, in situations other than our own" (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002: 9). Imagining another's perspective, according to Currie and Ravenscroft, is a form of *recreative imagination* in which the imaginer simulates the mental states and attitudes another person does or would have, relative to a series of relevant (background-) beliefs that are attributed to her. One could, in consequence, be tempted to suggest that perspectives can be defined by the list of mental states and attitudes a person, who has a certain background of beliefs or finds herself in a given situation, would have.

(*ii*) In the second sense, the term "perspective" refers not to a point of view, nor to a set of a person's attitudes, but to a *technique* or a *method of representing*. This is the sense in which we use the term when we say that linear perspective was invented in the Renaissance: in the

early 15th century, Brunelleschi introduced a *method* of representing three-dimensional objects in their spatial relations to adjacent objects on a bidimensional plane. I will discuss this historical moment in more detail in the next section, for now it suffices to note that the term "perspective" can stand for a technique or a method that allows a person, who is trained to use it, to represent any kind of object or scenario.

In this sense, "perspective" can no longer be defined as a set of a person's beliefs or attitudes, but as the mechanism that produces beliefs of a certain kind when a person is confronted with a certain object or finds herself in a certain scenario. This is the meaning of "perspective" that is operative in the very stimulating account that was developed by Elisabeth Camp. In a recent article, she suggests that "having a perspective is a matter of cognitive action rather than cognitive content" (Camp 2017: 79), and proposes the following definition:

> a perspective is an open-ended disposition to notice, explain, and respond to situations in the world — an ability to "go on the same way" in assimilating and responding to whatever information and experiences one encounters. (Camp 2017: 78)

Camp calls the disposition "open-ended" because it can be applied—and will produce new results—in ever new circumstances. A person who has acquired the relevant disposition, in other words, is able to represent any object or scenario she wants to.[9] Her suggestion that perspectives are dispositions underlines that for Camp, perspectives are only in part under our voluntary control. This choice is likely motivated by the fact that all persons always already have a perspective; one does not need to choose to have one, nor does one need to acquire one, which suggests that—at least in some basic forms—perspectives are automatic and intuitive ways to notice, to explain and to respond to features of our environment.

It can nonetheless be instructive to confront one's own perspective with that of others, which happens, according to Camp, when we "try on" a different perspective. In order to do so, one needs to take on, at least temporarily, a different disposition:

> Trying on a perspective requires more than just imagining that a set of propositions is true, or even imagining experiencing something. Rather, it involves actually structuring one's thinking in certain ways, so that certain sorts of properties stick out as especially notable and explanatorily central in one's intuitive thinking. (Camp 2017: 74)

This passage shows that Camp offers an interesting alternative to the idea we have explored above, according to which imagining another's perspective consisted in imaginatively adopting a set of beliefs and simulating the mental episodes a person would have before this background.

[9] This, of course, only holds for objects that are suited to trigger the relevant disposition or to be represented by the respective method. The method of linear perspective, for example, allows painters only to depict objects that are spatially extended (be they real or not)—they could not rely on the method to depict abstract objects.

We can note, however, that "trying on" another perspective in Camp's sense is quite demanding, it takes much more than pretending to adopt a set of beliefs and simulating a series of mental episodes. One cannot strip off a disposition and try on another one as easily as one takes off a pair of shoes in a store to try on a new one. *Trying on* a perspective, according to Camp, requires us to *interiorize* the other's "disposition to notice, explain, and respond to situations in the world" (Camp 2017: 78), which means to interiorize, at least for some time, also the most basic ways of reacting automatically and intuitively to one's environment. In a way, we need to become another person for that time; taking on another perspective is "temporarily altering us 'as we are'" (Camp 2017: 94). Moreover, it is demanding not only to try on another's perspective, it can also prove difficult to strip it off when one is done; the game of perspectives might have a lasting impact on one's personality—which can explain the manipulative power of some works of fiction. According to Camp, "adopting a perspective is partly but not entirely under one's voluntary control. And even when we try on perspectives temporarily, in the context of fiction, doing so may have lingering cognitive effects" (Camp 2017: 74).

With this account, Elisabeth Camp makes a significant contribution to the debate that substantially advances our understanding of perspective. The short sketch that I have given shows that she defines "perspective" as a mechanism to guide attention, to generate beliefs and to trigger responses in all different kinds of circumstances in which we might find ourselves. I do fear, however, that her explanation of how we can try on another's perspective is not fully convincing; the process described seems too laborious. In most cases, it does not take much effort to imagine another's perspective—we do so, at different degrees of profoundness, in many exchanges with other persons in everyday life, without having to become another one; we do so in a more playful way when we imagine hypothetical perspectives in games of make-believe that are solicited by works of fictional narrative; and we do so when we "jump" with ease from one perspective to another while pondering over a philosophical or scientific problem.

Moreover, perspectives seem to have a social and normative dimension that dispositions do not have. One can adopt a certain perspective for reasons and can share one's perspective with others, but it is not clear to me that this also holds for dispositions. Rather than being shared, the latter seem to run parallel. A person masters a technique or applies a method when she is able to conform her own behavior to a set of rules or principles; she has a disposition, on the other hand, if stimuli of a certain form regularly trigger a certain reply. Accordingly, two persons share the same perspective when they share (more or less) the same set of rules or principles to which they conform their behavior; they have the same disposition, on the other hand, when they react to similar stimuli in similar ways that are not shared, but are merely parallel to one another.

It seems to me that Camp's position is at an impasse at this point. In the next section I will suggest that a look back in time can help us to overcome it: there is a lesson to be learned from the dynamics of the events that unfolded when linear perspective was invented in Renaissance painting.

## 4. *The Invention of Linear Perspective in Renaissance Painting*

The invention of linear perspective in Renaissance painting is generally attributed to Filippo Brunelleschi, who developed a method that allowed artists to faithfully represent space, or rather, three-dimensional objects in their spatial relations to adjacent objects. Applying this method, it was suggested, a painter could depict three-dimensional scenarios "as the eye sees them". Leon Battista Alberti famously compared the plane of a painting with a pane of a window; ideally, a well-drafted painting should be able to trick the observer and make her believe that she is seeing a real scenario through a transparent window.

Brunelleschi liked to demonstrate his mastery with an experiment that involved two of his paintings that faithfully represented two eminent buildings in Florence, the *Baptistery* and the *Palazzo de' Signori,* in their actual contexts. He invited people to assume a clearly defined position in front of one of the two buildings, presumably the position he had occupied when drawing the paintings, and to peek through a small hole in the plane of the painting that was positioned in front of their eyes, with the backside facing them. Moreover, it was possible to place a mirror between the observer and the building at an appropriate distance, in which the painting could be reflected. The test persons peaked through the plane towards the building and were asked to decide whether they saw the actual building or the reflection of the painting in the mirror. If we want to believe the account of Brunelleschi's early biographer Antonio Manetti (1970: 52ff), they were not able to tell the difference: Brunelleschi's paintings were indistinguishable from the real scenarios.

In his study on the history of perspective, Martin Kemp points out that it is not by accident that Brunelleschi conducted his experiment with two paintings that showed actual buildings. In fact, when developing his method, he was driven by his interest in architecture. Already during his first trip to Rome he made drawings of buildings using measurements and simple calculations based on triangulation.[10] Brunelleschi's exact method is not recorded, but we know that it relied on real buildings as a starting point for its perspectival projections:

> Brunelleschi's method took as its starting point a set of actual buildings, working *from* these towards a perspectival projection. He was not, therefore, creating an independent space on *a priori* principles. He required some

[10] Cf. Manetti (1970: 152f).

> method of plotting the salient features of the views on flat surface of the picture plane, which thus came to function as a kind of window. (Kemp 1992: 14)

Brunelleschi, thus, had developed a method to depict three-dimensional scenarios most faithfully, but he could do so only by relying on buildings he could actually see; he could not have applied his method to paint imaginary or fictional ones: "The procedures relied upon existing buildings and, inevitably, resulted in the portrayal of these buildings" (Kemp 1992: 15).[11]

In subsequent decades, Brunelleschi's method was further developed, both in the workshops, where individual painters adopted it—each of them adjusting it in their own way that met their own practical purposes—and in a more systematic and rigorous way by painters like Leon Battista Alberti, Piero della Francesca or Albrecht Dürer, who gave systematic descriptions of it and so contributed to its codification.[12] In their treatises, they presented linear perspective as a method that was based on principles of mathematics, geometry and optics, "without which no one can become a true artisan" (Dürer 1977: 37). This step in the development was an enormous achievement that fundamentally changed not only the artistic practice, but also the way people looked at paintings. Let me highlight two aspects that are particularly relevant for our debate.

First, the theoretical, systematic, and scientifically informed explanation of the method conferred particular authority on it. It suggested that linear perspective was more than an idiosyncratic style: it was presented as a technique that allowed to avoid embarrassing errors and to depict the world *correctly*; painters who applied the method could come to represent reality "as the eye sees it". This promise bestowed an assertive force on the painting, which turned it into a claim, as it were.[13] By depicting a scenario, it is as if the painter would affirm that "*this is how things look*" or better: "*this is what a person would have seen if she had been in the relevant position in the right moment in time*." This entails, however, that there are *criteria of correctness*

[11] This, incidentally, was one of the reasons why Brunelleschi's method did not catch on right away: it could not be put to use by other painters. "Painters were not employed to paint townscapes as such, except in very unusual circumstances, and a set of existing buildings is unlikely to have provided an appropriate or adaptable setting for the religious subject-matter which predominated" (Kemp 1992: 15).

[12] The parallel development of perspective, on a more practical level in the workshops and on a theoretical level in the treatises, is emphasized by Feyerabend, cf. (1999: 98); cf also (Kemp 1992: 21–44). The process of codification took place in a period of several decades; Kemp suggests that Brunelleschi's invention of perspective occurred in or before 1413 (cf. Kemp 1992: 9). Leon Battista Alberti's treatise *De pictura* dates from 1435, Piero della Francesca's *De prospectiva pingendi* was written in the in the mid-1470s to 1480s, and Dürer's *Underweysung der messung* was completed in 1525.

[13] For this reason, it has been argued by art historians, the invention of linear perspective has changed the way we look at paintings; cf. Büttner (2005).

for pictorial representation, and invites to hold the painting against reality—as Brunelleschi has done with his experiment, which we have discussed above.

It did not take very long, however, until it was unveiled that linear perspective could not live up to this promise. Leonardo noted already in the last decade of the 15th century that there was a difference between visual and physical space, which coincide only when the observer looks at things from a fixed position.[14] Moreover, Paul Feyerabend's discussion of Brunelleschi's experiment suggests that the criteria for correctness are not absolute or universally valid. It is not possible to determine—in a way that can be extended to all kinds of pictorial representation—how we are supposed to hold a painting against an independent reality. Even Brunelleschi, Feyerabend suggests, when conducting the experiment, examined his painting (of the *Baptistery* or the *Palazzo de' signori*) by checking it against *something else*, but:

> This "something else" was not a building; it was a building as seen with a single eye in a precisely defined place or, as I shall say, … an aspect of a building … His experiment involved two artifacts, not an artifact (the painting) and an art-independent "reality." (Feyerabend 1999: 100)

According to Feyerabend, we should understand the painting, the depicted object, and the method of representation as elements of a stage that was built by Brunelleschi—and each comparison between the painting and the object takes place on this stage. We cannot simply treat the painting and the building as two independent objects and compare one with the other. There are too many differences that hold between them and that need to be systematically neglected: "The building was large, heavy, three-dimensional, made of stone; the picture small, light, its surface two-dimensional, and it was made of wood (a panel) covered by layers of pigment" (Feyerabend 1999: 100). A painting is a bi-dimensional projection of a three-dimensional scenario that follows a clearly defined method; it is faithful to some, but systematically distorts or neglects other aspects of reality. Thus, when we hold the painting against reality to judge whether the representation is faithful, we need to focus on the aspects which—relative to the method applied—are considered relevant, and to systematically neglect other ones. The criteria that determine whether the representation is *correct*, in other words, are defined from "within" the method.

This stands in contrast with a basic assumption that was widely shared in the Renaissance and from which the assertive force of the paintings had emerged: the assumption that linear perspective is an objectively valid method to *correctly* depict an independent reality—to represent real scenarios as an "innocent eye" would see them. In short,

[14] Moreover, Leonardo became aware that a strict application of the method would lead to systematic distortions when one tries to apply it to "a series of objects of equal size distributed at equal intervals along a plane perpendicular to our axis of vision" (Kemp 1992: 49).

linear perspective was invented as an "absolute" method to correctly represent reality, but there are good reasons to suggest that the criteria of correctness are not absolute; they do not hold independently of this method, but are defined from within. This was the first point in which I think the invention of linear perspective is relevant for our present purposes.

The second point focuses on the fact that the early treatises on linear perspective present the method by the rules and principles that guide it. The treatises are designed as *manuals* that gave detailed descriptions of the concrete steps one had to perform in order to apply this method of representation. Linear perspective, thus, became a method that was clearly defined by rules and principles and could be passed on to others—to artists and artisans, who could use it for their practical purposes.[15]

By introducing these rules and principles, the method was raised to a level of abstraction that made it superfluous to take actual buildings as starting points for perspectival projections. Painters could now apply the method also to depict imaginary scenarios, which creates an interesting dialectic tension with the fact that linear perspective established an "assertive claim". Linear perspective is (or better: was conceived as) a method that allows the painter to faithfully represent, down to the last detail, any real scenario. The resulting assertive claim might be bracketed, but remains subliminally present even when the method is applied to a hypothetical or counterfactual scenario, which makes the painter's invitation to explore it in the imagination even more forceful. It so substantially increases the efficacy of the work.[16]

Moreover, once the rules and principles that govern the method are made explicit, they can be reflected, criticized, emended or revised; most importantly, they can be used creatively, bended or even violated. This happened quite early in Renaissance painting and added a new level of quality to it. Some painters quickly realized that by distorting their projections they could achieve particularly powerful effects. The invention of linear perspective, thus, has paved the way for a special technique, *anamorphosis*, that allowed painters like Raphael, Mantegna, Correggio, Parmigianino and many others to achieve illusionistic effects of a highest aesthetic quality. When bending the rules of representations, anamorphisms not only presuppose the very existence of these rules, they also draw the observer's attention towards them. As

[15] This aspect becomes particularly evident already in the title of Dürer's treatise, *Underweysung der messung mit dem zirckel und richtscheyt* [*Instruction for measuring with Compass and Ruler*].

[16] David Hume individuated a similar effect in the context of literary fiction, when he states: "Poets themselves, tho' liars by profession, always endeavour to give an air of truth to their fictions; and where that is totally neglected, their performances, however ingenious, will never be able to afford much pleasure." (Hume 1978: 121) Thus, the efficacy of literary fiction, according to Hume, depends on the author's talent to "give an air of truth" to her fictions.

representations of fictional scenarios, they invite the audience to immerse into a world of fiction, but they also draw, at the same time, their attention towards the technique of representation that had been applied to represent these scenarios—and with it the rules and principles that govern our representational activities.

In conclusion, this short excursus on the invention of linear perspective in Renaissance painting has shown that perspective is a technique or method of representation that is guided by rules and principles. In their treatises, Renaissance painters have tried to formulate these rules in a systematic way—very much like grammarians try to make the rules that govern language explicit—with the purpose to pass it on to others, which shows that perspective is a technique that can be taught and acquired; it is a social practice that can be shared with others. Finally, works of art are particularly apt to draw attention to the rules that constitute and guide this practice; and they do so in a particularly forceful way when they bend them.

## 5. *How to imagine other perspectives*

We have seen above (end of Section 3) that according to Camp, trying on another perspective consists in adopting a disposition to notice, to explain, and to respond to situations in the world. I have suggested that this explanation is quite laborious, as it requires us to strip off our own dispositions and to take on other ones; in a way one has to become, if only temporarily, another person. This, I have suggested, does not seem to do justice to the fact that in everyday life we often switch perspective—and in many cases it does not take much effort to do so.

A look back at the invention of perspective in Renaissance painting offers us a slightly different explanation that might be more appropriate in these cases: in light of the discussion presented in Section 4, it seems reasonable to suggest that a perspective is not a disposition, but a *rule-guided method* or *technique* of representing that determines, which aspects of our environment we will likely note by rendering some aspects salient and occluding others; which allows us to explain what's happening around us by suggesting how it fits into a bigger picture; and which enables us to act or to engage in certain forms of behavior in response to it.

This understanding of perspective is more demanding than Camp's; it allows us to attribute perspectives only to creatures who are able to engage in rule-following behavior. Camp is right when she states that "adopting a perspective is partly but not entirely under one's voluntary control" (Camp 2017: 74). After all, some aspects of one's perspective likely result from one's biological constitution and the set-up of one's perceptual apparatus, which allows us to take in some, but makes us blind to other aspects of our environment. It seems important to me, however, to insist that having a perspective is possible only for those who are aware that it is possible to shift perspectives and who have an

understanding that there are other persons who have, in fact, adopted different perspectives on the shared environment.

This underlines the importance of being able to "try on" other perspectives. I suggest that we rely on our capacity of imagination to do so. Imagining another's perspective consists in reconstructing the rules and principles that govern the respective technique, in figuring out which results they would produce in determinate circumstances, and in grasping the criteria that determine whether a resulting representation is correct. This does not require us to temporarily give up our own perspective, it rather requires us to understand and interiorize rules of representation that are different from our own as well as to apply these rules and to act according to them.

Camp is definitely right when she insists that trying on a perspective has a practical dimension, which, I think, should be understood as *mastering a technique* or *learning to apply rules*. But there are differences in degree, and one can come to understand another perspective also on a more theoretical level. There is an important analogy between imagining a perspective and learning a second language: In a first step, one needs to learn the rules of grammar. The resulting theoretical knowledge can suffice to reconstruct the meaning of an utterance in that language and to determine which forms of linguistic behavior are considered appropriate in it—even though it might take some time and effort to do so. Applying unfamiliar rules and principles can be arduous. When we deal with dead languages like Latin or ancient Greek, we typically content ourselves with this level of proficiency. Similarly, one can come to understand another perspective by gaining theoretical knowledge concerning the rules and principles that govern it—and this knowledge can suffice to reconstruct "what the world looks like" for a person who adopts it.

Becoming fluent in a foreign language, as well as *adopting* another's perspective, on the other hand, has also a practical dimension, though. If one manages to interiorize the rules of grammar and to acquire the practical skills to behave according to them, one will become fluent in that language—but remains fluent in one's first language. Similarly, if one learns to apply the rules of representing that govern a perspective, one will learn to see the world in a different way—and, at the same time, remain aware of what it looks like from one's own perspective.

Imagining other perspectives can, of course, have effects on one's own. A new technique of representing might be so convincing that one deliberately decides to leave one's old perspective behind in favor of the new one. In less radical cases, one might try to integrate relevant aspects of the other technique into one's own (if possible). Sometimes, imagining other perspectives might lead to evolutions that consist in minor adjustments of one's own perspective that are hardly noticed. These are the cases Camp likely has in mind when she suggests that trying on a perspective can have "lingering cognitive effects" (Camp

2017, 74). Also here we have an interesting analogy with the acquisition of a second language: the more a person immerses into a foreign language, the more she risks that it can have "lingering effects" on her first language—it might make her use unusual idioms or alter her accent or the melody of her speech.

In the present paper I have argued that perspective is best defined not as a "disposition to notice, explain, and respond to situations in the world" (Camp 2017: 78), but as a rule-guided method or technique of noticing and representing, which has an immediate impact on how we come to understand and respond to what is going on around us. When we first develop a perspective—very much like when we acquire a first language—we do not do so by conscious choice. Moreover, we deeply interiorize the rules that guide the practice. This explains how it can seem that adopting a perspective is "partly but not entirely under one's voluntary control" (Camp 2017: 74). It is important to note, however, that once one has come to have an understanding of these rules, one can revise and alter them—or "try on" another perspective by temporarily adopting a different set of rules.

The rules in question determine how we represent the world around us, which aspects are salient, and how we react to given situations; they guide activities that are relevant for our understanding. Trying on another perspective in this sense is particularly efficient when we are interested in finding out where it would lead us if we would perform these activities (of noticing and representing) in systematically different ways that are guided by different rules and principles. Which aspects of our environment would result salient, which would come to be occluded? How would we understand what is going on around us within this different perspective? Which effect would that have on our ways to respond?

Let me note that there is an interesting contrast between this sense of "trying on another's perspective" and trying to understand a subjective point of view in the sense I have discussed above (Section 2). When we try to understand what things "feel like" for another subject, we might be driven by trying to get in touch with the other as a person, which explains why our empathetic capacities play a central role in the positions I have discussed. When we try to understand which impact a different method of representing would have on the result, on the other hand, our main focus is on how a person—not a specific individual, but any person who adopts this perspective—would come to notice, explain and respond to situations in the world. We are, in short, not interested in the other as a person, but in the rules she has adopted that guide the way in which she comes to make sense of what is going on around her.

This result can make the present account particularly apt for explaining our interest in works of narrative fiction. We hardly read a novel or watch a movie because we are interested in the characters *as persons*—after all, we know that they are but the products of imagination who have never really existed. In many cases we are rather inter-

ested in their perspectives—in the sense of a rule-guided methods or techniques to notice, explain and respond to given situations. In other words, when engaging with fiction, we are typically not interested in having encounters with *persons*, but with *agents* who have adopted a certain set of rules and principles that guide their behavior. With their detailed descriptions of how characters notice, explain and respond to situations, works of narrative fiction are particularly apt to allow for encounters of this kind. We are, of course, fully aware that these agents are creatures of fiction who have never really existed. This does not undermine our understanding, though. Rather, it helps us to draw our attention not at the characters, but at their perspectives.

## 6. *Conclusion*

In the present paper, I have focused on one particular response to the anti-cognitivist challenge: the thesis that works of narrative fiction can broaden our understanding of other perspectives or points of view. I have argued that this thesis can be understood in two different ways: in a first reading, it suggests that works of narrative fiction help us to gain an understanding of subjective experiences one might not (yet) have made oneself. I have suggested that the focus of these accounts can be on the qualitative aspects of experience or on the nature of subjectivity. I have argued that works of narrative fiction are successful in communicating this form of knowledge only if they solicit *de se* imaginings in their audience. Moreover, approaches of this kind likely suggest that the audience takes an empathic stance towards the works or the characters described in it.

A second reading of the thesis conceives of perspective as a rule-guided method or technique to note, to explain and to respond to relevant aspects of one's environment. I have discussed Elisabeth Camp's account of perspective, which seemed laborious when it comes to trying on other perspectives. A look back at the invention of linear perspective in Renaissance painting has opened the way to define perspective as a rule-guided method or technique of representing. According to this conception, imagining another person's perspective does not consist in trying on another's dispositions to note, to explain and to respond, but merely requires us to reconstruct—at a merely theoretical or at a practical level—the rules and principles that guide the other's method of representing.[17]

[17] I have presented earlier drafts of this paper at the "Fact, Fiction and Narration" conference at the University of Rijeka and at the MUMBLE workshop "Imagining, Understanding and Knowing" at the University of Turin. I want to thank the audience at these workshops, as well as two anonymous referees of this journal, for their interesting suggestions and critique. A particular thanks goes to the members of PRISMA (the Parma research group on imagination in the sciences, philosophy of mind and the arts), and in particular to Irene Binini and Daniele Molinari, for our extensive discussions on these topics that have helped me to get a clearer view on the topics presented here.

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# *Space, Dwelling, and (Be)longingness: Virginia Woolf's Art of Narration*

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*The supple and ever-present search for the possibilities offered by the narrative form in fictional writing corresponds to the use of the narrative as a mode of understanding and explaining our being-in-the-world in philosophy. The intimate liaison between the realm of fictional imagination and that of human everydayness inspires writers to seek ways to tackle issues of temporality, the conflicting character of human drives, and the ultimately unresolvable tension between finitude and infinitude. As a literary and philosophical category, the narrative remains an inexhaustible space for the exploration of the way we understand our lives. I propose a hermeneutic investigation of the interactions between the art of narration and the categories of space, presence/absence, and (be)longingness as evoked in Virginia Woolf's* Mrs. Dalloway. *This article engages Martin Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity, and, more specifically, his notions of homelessness and homecoming, to shed light on the inimitable character of Woolf's artistic representations of the spatial dimension of human existence, reality viewed as both tremulous and solid, as well as of human embodiment and the disparity/closeness between the corporeal and the spiritual.*

**Keywords:** Dwelling; narrative; space; Heidegger; Woolf; philosophical hermeneutics.

## 1. *Introduction*

Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), takes place on a single day in June soon after the Great War. The story sets off with the eponymous heroine, Clarissa Dalloway, a middle-aged woman and an excellent socialite, preparing for her party. The novel's plot is built on

continuous shifts between the past and the present. It is immersed in a time continuum with no sharp distinction between those two perspectives. Time stops and time is regained. The memories of events that are gone seem to be as real as those of the present time. Moreover, time, which is rendered in the novel through prolepsis and analepsis, is shown in its inextricable connection to space. Clarissa's manifold recollections are heightened by the grandeur and conviviality of a social gathering. In its pervasive interest in human temporality, *Mrs. Dalloway* provides multiple insights into the interweaving nature of the philosophical categories of narration, space, time, presence/absence, dwelling, and (be)longingness. Clarissa is shown as continually dwelling in two different time/space realms and, thus also two divergent states of being: the 'corporeal tangibility' of the present time of living the life of an upper-class lady and the internalized past time of retrospective wandering in thoughts to the places she used to know and love in her youth. The contrast between the emptiness of the embodied present and the rich in reminiscence mental remaining in the past is only subtle, and it is maintained by the narrative's constant movement backward and forward in time.

The narrative's spatio-temporal shifts serve to evoke the chasm between the spiritual and the corporeal. The novel examines temporality and dwelling as inextricably and meaningfully interwoven, as revealing something important about our being-in-the-world. Drawing on Henri Bergson's *la durée*, Woolf adopts for her fiction the notion of an interior, immaterial time, which varies from clock time (see Bergson 2004). Thus, although the historical time of the narrative's action is sketched precisely, it is mostly the psychological time that Woolf explores in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Bergson's differentiation was later appropriated by Heidegger. His notion of existential time, of that form of temporality which is uniquely integrated with individual consciousness, speaks to the integral nature of time and being for Heidegger (1962: 466–470). It is the Heideggerian perspective that is illuminating to Woolf's project. For Heidegger, it is one's ability to situate the present moment within the contexts of the past and future, as well as to assert one's autonomy within the constraints of external, determining forces that shape one's fate (Heidegger 1962: 416–417).

Woolf's fictional imaginings resonate with the precepts of Heidegger's philosophy of temporality while revealing a human being's capability of understanding as unfolding in time and reaching its peak in the moment of a profound apprehension of the inescapability of death. Clarissa is positioned within the present but remains intimately aware of the past and future. She strives to locate her being in the spatio-temporal reality, and it is only by identifying with the death of the Other (Septimus Smith), that she embraces the prospect of her own death and is able to accept her own agency and live out her fate.[1] This

[1] A detailed exploration of the significance of space in Woolf's fiction is offered, for instance, by Seeley (1996).

new opening helps her face the constraints of a life lived within pure facticity. The moment in which she contemplates the transgression of the barrier between life and death enables her to contemplate her own existence profoundly (*Sein-zum-Tode*). This overpowering intensity of understanding is enhanced by Clarissa's continuous juxtapositions of the past against the present. Reminiscing the past events, she bridges the rather unsatisfying present with the fulfilling past while reading and re-reading the story of her life as a meaningful whole.[2]

The novel's evocation of human finitude inspires us to contemplate how its narrative renders existentiality, and thus, space, time, and the human mode of dwelling. Clarissa struggles to appropriate the individuality of her world and become attuned to the rhythmical patterns of Being. However, her unique unrepeatability is buried under an urge to keep up a façade and comply with the requirements of social life. The possibility of imprinting her uniqueness into reality by understanding a certain kind of surrender as precious and fulfilling is thwarted. Her engagement in various distractions prevents an effective "plunge" into an authentic life.

A host of important similarities between Woolf's understanding of human existence as manifested in *Mrs. Dalloway* (and her other fictions) and Heidegger's philosophy of facticity encourages us to probe the intersecting paths of literary and philosophical discourse in their common attunement to our being-in-the-world, in which space, time, and dwelling feature as central categories. Woolf's understanding of existentiality is indissolubly interconnected with her view of authenticity. She differentiates between what she calls "being" that is, the state of being sensitized to something crucial about life due to a sudden 'shock' and the non-being—"the cotton wool" of everyday trivialities (see Olson 2003).[3] Woolf's inimitable response to the quandaries of human existence, through which she upholds the exigency of living an authentic life, concords with Heidegger's insistence on the curious consciousness and his assertion of *Dasein's* authenticity in *Being and Time*: "being true as discovering is a manner of being of Dasein" (1962: 203). Similarly, Woolf's understanding of authenticity finds an important parallel in Heidegger's philosophy of facticity, which discloses the significant interconnection between being alone and being-with, and which is apt-

[2] Inspecting her life in retrospect, Clarissa becomes the narrator of the story of her life. Linking together the various elements of her life, she is capable of reading, interpreting, and bringing into a meaningful whole the events of her life. Woolf's embodiment of the rereading of a narrative of life concords with Paul Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity, which embraces both the changing nature of the human subject in the course of time and the unchanging core of human subjectivity. Ricoeur avers that human life becomes understandable once the story of one's life is told (see Ricoeur 1991a, 1991b, and also 1992).

[3] In "Sketch of the Past" Woolf confesses: "I have been baffled by this same problem; that is, how to describe what I call in my private shorthand—'non-being' (Woolf 1976: 70).

ly expressed in his own words: "By reasons of this *with-like* [*mithaften*] being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of [human existence] is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]" (1962: 118). The novelist's hermeneutic thinking, which manifests itself in presenting her characters as living the mysterious suggestiveness of the patterns of Being—the relational being is part of the structure of Being—calls to mind Heidegger's recognition of our individuation as embedded in mutual connectivity: "only as being-with can [one] be alone" (1985: 238). Moreover, Woolf's meditation on human dwelling in time shows the paradoxical nature of absence as a mode of presence. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf, in a similar vein to Heidegger, reveals the intricate nature of absence in a human being's incessantly repeated (*Wieder-holung*) and never satisfied search for a meaningful existence.

By bringing space, time, and dwelling to actualization, Woolf's fiction provides important philosophical insights. Her hermeneutic sensibility, which enables her to discern the multi-faceted and non-restrictive nature of the phenomena of time and space and evoke them in fictional writing, resonates with Heidegger's philosophical hermeneutics and allows his complex ideas to manifest in the beauty of her literary discourse. Set side by side, Woolf's prose and Heidegger's philosophy reveal the breadth and depth of the hermeneutic inquiry into that which is most fundamental in our being-in-the-world—an understanding of our temporality and our sense of space. Reading *Mrs. Dalloway* in tandem with Heidegger's philosophy of facticity contributes to a better understanding of her fictional world on the one hand, and the fleshing out of Heidegger's sophisticated philosophical ideas on the other.

## 2. *The mystery of dwelling. Time and space in Mrs. Dalloway*

*Mrs. Dalloway*'s preoccupation with space in connection with our humanity has been the focus of many works of Woolfian scholarship (see Seeley 1996, Simone 2017, Weatherhead 1985). Emma Simone discerns the deep relationship between the sense of space and the phenomenology of being a human being in Woolf's fictional imaginings:

> Woolf's representations of space demonstrate her understanding that such locations provide the individual with the potential means to carry out his or her intentions, form and gather memories, and feel safe and welcome; alternatively, and even simultaneously, Woolf's writings signify place as the sight of threat, unease, and thwarted hopes and desires. Place facilitates our connections with the Other, and sense of inclusion, as well as our moments of solitude, isolation, and exclusion. From conception to death, place is a primordial and integral element of what it means to be human (Simone 2017: 64).[4]

[4] By bringing into conversation Woolf's aesthetics of space and Heidegger's philosophy of facticity, I follow Emma Simone's line of thinking that draws attention to the affinities between the former's preoccupation with space as carrying human

Through the correlation between mental and physical reality—the crossing of physical thresholds is evocative of overcoming mental barriers—*Mrs. Dalloway* shows how the literary embodiment of space can say something crucial about human dwelling-in-the-world. Woolf recycles the literary motif of the physical barrier to signify mental partition; the novel's material divisions (windows and doors) represent not only the state of being separated from another reality but also the possibility of integration with it (see Olk 2014: 55).[5] At the novel's outset, a depiction of Clarissa's excitement about a superb, June morning after a period of convalescence, expressed in her fervent exclamation: "What a lark, what a plunge!" (MD 1) discloses the narrative's preoccupation with the embodiment of space (Guth 1989). Plunge is a metaphorical dive into a reality larger than Clarissa's present way of dwelling. Her physical 'plunge', which arises from her desire to remain in oneness with outer reality, also foreshadows her mental transgression of the sorrowful state of semi-inflicted confinement to the life-narrowing space of the attic room where she spends much of her time. It is an act in which she immerses herself anew in the world that surpasses her individual, lonely, and constricted dwelling as a mode of being-in-the-world.

The novel's opening scene leads us to appreciate a variety of other episodes that demonstrate Woolf's keen interest in evoking space as one that partakes of and expresses a human longing to reach out for a reality that brings about a seminal change, a sense of completion and happiness. The desire for completion stems from a pervasive sense of finitude, the-not-being-at-home-yet, but it also arises from the need to transcend a particular mode of dwelling. Dwelling entails safeguarding, holding in esteem what is valuable, and preserving. A human being's being and dwelling are inextricably linked. Heidegger famously says:

> To dwell, to be set at peace means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving. It pervades dwelling in its whole range. That range reveals itself to us as soon as we reflect that human being consists in dwelling and, indeed, dwelling in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth (Heidegger 1971: 147).

Clarissa's mode of dwelling relates mainly to the past or to that which-is-not-yet. The brokenness of her life, mitigated with the façade of respectability, is the space that calls for transgressing the present as a

intentions, emotions, and memories and the latter's acknowledgement of the meaningful closeness of human temporality and space. Reminding us of Heidegger's seminal words: "The temporality of Being-in-the-world' is "the foundation for that spatiality which is specific for Dasein" (*BT*: 384), Simone also indicates that Heideggerian scholarship discloses his contribution to the hermeneutics of place alongside his focus of time (Simone 2017: 64–65).

[5] Olk sketches the ways in which Woolf uses the trope of window, especially in Chapter 2.

way of dwelling. Woolf expresses this in images that evoke the traversing of the physical reality of the unsatisfactory present and are representative of a change.

Woolf pursues the well-known literary trope of a window to express the tangibility/intangibility of the longed-for reality. Open windows carry important connotations of freedom, revelation, and newness. Fundamentally, they signify a possibility of self-recognition that results from a person's reflection in the windowpane (as if in a mirror). Windows provide a mediated contact with another world and indicate semi-permeability as "…they foreground metaphorical materiality which disrupts any kind of direct and unmediated vision, and emphasizes subjectivity, fragmentation, selectivity, and an aesthetic distance" (Olk 2014: 56). Clarissa glances into a bookstore window display, savors the hustle and bustle of London through the window at the florists, and observes the older woman who lives opposite her window. Not touching or reaching the world behind the window, she partakes in it in a mediated way and experiences an intense spiritual communion with it. Most importantly, in episodes in which she opens the window wide (a few times throughout the novel), she reconnects with the exterior, gasping for air and grasping the outside as hospitable to her tangled self.

Asserting the symbolic significance of windows in the novel, Molly Hoff notices: "*Mrs. Dalloway*, …, is a literary maze leading all to a conclusion that is duplicitous and uncertain. The novel is double-coded and designed to be read through more than one lens. Under the influence of epiphany, however, windows in the labyrinth offer moments of vision, and doorways lead into new states of being" (2009: 8). Woolf's use of the symbolism of windows reminds us of Emily Brontë's embodiment of traversing mental states through the crossing of the window/door/gate partition in *Wuthering Heights*. Clarissa 'resuscitates' after a period of convalescence by bursting the window wide open, much like the dying Catherine, who asks Nelly to open the window wide so she can breathe in the air of the moors in Brontë's novel. In this, she hearkens back to a similar act when, as a young girl, she plunged into the open air through a French window at Bourton, her family house. This theme is an echo of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, in which Marcel's mother and grandmother are constantly concerned with opening windows and gasping for fresh air. Cognizing Proustian intertexts, Hoff ascertains that Woolf alludes to a wider cultural context. The critic reminds us that: "In ancient Roman culture, all doors, gates, and ways of entrance and exit are sacred as the symbolic sites of beginnings and endings" (2009: 11). These and other intertextual allusions sensitize us to the abundance of meanings evoked through Woolf's initial placement of her heroine at the border between two different worlds and draw our attention to the ensuing episodes, pregnant with meaning because of the crossing/sustaining of the barrier between two differing realities.

Severed from the mainstream of life energy, her possibilities curtailed, and dreams undermined, Clarissa, the 'captive' of a separate bedroom on the upper floor, makes a *leap* into a new way of being, which liberates her at the social and personal level. Her weakened self-agency regains its power. Clarissa's 'dive' is a subverted echo of the Heideggerian notion of 'thrownness'.[6] Its evocative power and significance make one think of *Dasein's* alienation from Being and a human urge to belong. The 'plunge' symbolizes the entrance into the reality beyond one's present premises, the shift in a dwelling that arises from the spatio-temporal movement. Already *cast* into the circumstances of her life, Clarissa *casts* herself into a new reality, discarding melancholy and renewing her life's powers. Heidegger's insight into the nature of our being-in-the-world discloses the very essence of being a human being when he emphasizes that: "To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell. The old word *bauen*, which says that man is insofar as he dwells, …" (1971: 145). Clarissa's bold 'dive' is a metaphorical expression of her wish to build, to dwell anew, which, at the same time, means to *be anew*. Contrary to Septimus, who, in a suicidal act, plunges into the abyss of non-being, she throws herself into being, into life.[7]

The symbolically rich image of a solitary dwelling in the novel suggests not only the idea of seclusion but also declining physical condition, and even more significantly, mental health in disarray. On recovery, Clarissa's acute sense of isolation caused by illness transmutes into a lingering sentiment of separateness from the usual conduct of her married life. Pain, frustration, or even despondency mark the new stage in Mrs. Dalloway's life—the narrative's clandestine message is that she has entered menopause (cf. Bettinger 2007). According to Victorian social mores, menopause is equated with a woman's demise. The narrowness of the attic room as a living space effectively represents limited possibilities and a decreasing level of life expansion. Clarissa is increasingly aware of being unimportant, neglected, or even rejected. The line from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, suggestive of death and repeated several times in the novel, plays the role of an intensification of her fear of passing away: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun; for the shock of Lady Bruton asking Richard to lunch without her made the moment in which she had stood shiver, as a plant on the river-bed feels the shock of the passing oar and shivers: so she rocked: so she shivered" (MD 26).

[6] The term 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*), which Heidegger introduces in *Being and Time* reappears in a variety of contexts in his *magnum opus* and is one of the key terms in his philosophy of facticity: "This characteristic of Dasein's Being-this 'that it is'-is veiled in its 'whence' and "whither", yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the 'thrownness' of this entity into its 'there'; indeed, it is thrown in such a way that, as Being-in-the-world, it is the 'there'" (Heidegger 1962: 174).

[7] Septimus Warren is a war veteran who suffers from posttraumatic disorder. For the fear of being institutionalized, he takes his life away.

Mrs. Dalloway's physical (en)closure, which stands for her mental closure, is not only vividly conveyed through her confinement to a room whose singleness symbolizes the diminishing chances of fulfillment, aggravating the feeling of 'leaving the life stage.' Woolf expands on the symbolism of the attic room by adding an image of Clarissa's place of rest as becoming 'smaller': "Narrower and narrower her bed would be" (MD 27) (Hoff 2009: 65). The narrowness is suggestive of the lack of a loving party, and this hint is amplified by a seemingly innocuous remark on Clarissa's reading Plato in bed. According to Molly Hoff (2009: 65), an allusion to shrinking space in connection with the reading/loving process is touched by an undercurrent message of the possibility/impossibility of continued sexual life. Significantly, through the image of the immaculate cleanliness of the bedsheets, the narrative suggests that Clarissa's sleeping space is virgin-like: "She pierced the pincushion and laid her feathered yellow hat on the bed. The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. … lying there reading, for she slept badly, she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet" (MD 27).

Clarissa's undesirable state of entrapment in her house equals being devoid of the genuine possibilities of development and remaining in the well-known routines and incapacitating patterns of repeatability. Clarissa is compared to a nun, which is ironic given that she, like Woolf, is an agnostic: "Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went upstairs, paused at the window, came to the bathroom. … There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room. Women must put off their rich apparel. At midday, they must disrobe" (MD 27). The aligning of the nun-like retreat and a child's curiosity creates a one-of-a-kind intensity of dwelling in a space that is so very much different from others, so saturated with a sense of uniqueness and separateness. Shalom Rachman argues that the attic room symbolizes Clarissa's retreating to her true self—for a moment she is not a repressed Clarissa but disassembles her *self*, just like she undresses, to become self-composed anew. Her stay in the attic begets illuminating moments: "In the attic of her house, we get a glimpse of the 'attic' in her personality where her true being is locked up. It is here that her consciousness opens into depth, and she has a moment of vision, a moment of her true self" (Rachman 1972: 10). Musing on the symbolic function of the attic room in a broader context, Gaston Bachelard indicates the possibility of a positive connotation: the attic is a space where fears are gone: "In the attic, fears are easily 'rationalized' ... the day's experiences can always efface the fears of night" (2014: 40). For Clarissa, an attic is also a place of restored equilibrium; she often returns there in her thoughts to the happy past in her life and comes there to heal her memory.[8]

[8] Significantly, learning about the tragic event of Septimus' suicide, Mrs. Dalloway retreats to her solitary dwelling in the attic room. Erkin Kiryaman makes an interesting observation about the role the attic room plays in regaining life strength and directs the readers' attention to the special element of recovery

However, the narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* reveals that the growing melancholy, downheartedness, and hopelessness activate irrational forces in Clarissa's soul and mind. Mrs. Dalloway is not capable of a radical change in the vein of Edna Pontellier from Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*.[9] She does not fancy leaving her husband or having extramarital liaisons, and she is shown as succumbing to being disheartened and unhappy. The inner sentiment of not accepting her life and the fear of the impossibility of making it last are manifested in the spatial imagery suggestive of hesitance and unease:

> … she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing-room, an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break, but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl (MD 26).

Embodying the destructive power of melancholia associated with the weakened will, the novel shows how gloomy thoughts can seek an outlet in the base, unrefined emotions that Clarissa strives to deftly control.

Undoubtedly, satiated with bleak colors, the portrayal of Mrs. Dalloway capably alludes to Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester's mad wife in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (2006).[10] Woolf's novel also echoes Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* in that it depicts a female heroine who misses passion and love and is set against the backdrop of a complacent society preoccupied with possessing rather than living (see Laird 2014 for the intersection between *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Madame Bovary*). Importantly, the evocations of space in the novel draw our attention to the inseparability of human psychology and the place of one's dwelling. Bachelard comments on the reflection of the human psyche in the physicality of the space we are dwelling in the following way: "A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality: to distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of the house; it would mean developing veritable psychology of the house" (2014: 38–39). Like Bachelard, Woolf emphasizes in her fiction the indissoluble connection between a human being's mental states and their projections onto the places one occupies. The imagery of the isolated room that she deploys perfectly suits the solitariness that permeates her heroine's mind. Furthermore, the intimate permeability of human sentiments and the ma-

and its interconnection with memory: "The meaning of the attic, therefore, also involves Septimus' trauma entering Clarissa's mind. This vicarious effect explains that the attic is a symbol of memory and a metaphor for the archive is the complete construction of the mind" (Kiryaman 2016, 72).

[9] *Mrs. Dalloway* shares an important affinity with Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which features a female whose entrapment in domesticity is a harrowing experience and, thus, calls for and results in emancipation.

[10] Brontë's novel has become an important source of feminist criticism, reflected, for instance, in Gilbert and Gubar (2000).

teriality of a place of dwelling indicate the apparent reversal of the subject/object opposition. It seems very likely that, in addition to the psychology of a human subject, we can talk about the psychology of an object (the house) that evokes the feelings of a human being.

Heidegger makes an important point about the interrelationship between our human inwardness and the physicality of the space in which we live:

> Even when mortals turn "inward," taking stock of themselves, they do not leave behind their belonging to the fourfold [the earth, the sky, divinities, mortals]. When, as we say, we come to our senses and reflect on ourselves, we come back to ourselves from things without ever abandoning our stay among things. Indeed, the loss of rapport with things that occurs in states of depression would be wholly impossible if even such a state were not still what it is as a human state: that is, a staying with things (Heidegger 1971: 155).

With a parallel zest, Woolf interconnects the inner states of the characters' minds and their reflections in the materiality of objects. The space of the enigmatic attic room can be understood in a double-fold way. On the one hand, this room is an allegory of her inward journey—the attic is an inner chamber and represents the soul's self-reflection. Woolf recycles here the "introspection topos"—the human capability of examining the inner workings of her mind (Hoff 2009: 64). On the other hand, the narrative suggests that an attic is a real place satiated with tender feelings of seclusion. If we view the attic room as a real, physical space, the question of whether Clarissa's continuing stay there can be viewed as solitary detention and is dictated by the outside circumstances that beget resignation and unfulfillment, or if it is a conscious decision of an integrated ego remains unanswered.[11] However, the latter option seems to be rather unlikely since Clarissa is pictured as a sober, self-contained even if disconsolate individual. Mrs. Dalloway reflects on her life from hindsight, and although the narrative is not explicit about her dejection, profound sufferance arising from a lack of authenticity tints her meandering thoughts. Like Flaubert's Madame Bovary, Mrs. Dalloway is oddly alien to her social environment and does not succumb to its shallow and facetious lifestyle. A broken-hearted individual, whose youthful and true love was replaced by a business contract marriage, Clarissa is on a continuous search for a sense of belongingness and fulfillment.

Clarissa's pursuit of a place she would deem as one she belongs to draws our attention to the notion of separateness as understood by Heidegger. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the notion of *de-severance*, which stands for 'bringing close,' making close what was/is severed. He asserts: "'De-severing' amounts to making the farness vanish—that is, making the remoteness of something disappear, bringing it close" (1962,

[11] An engaging interpretation of a 'room' in a broader sense and context in Woolf's writings is offered in Stevenson (2014). Stevenson claims that both ideologically and fantastically room in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Room of One's Own* represents femininity.

23: 139). However, what is meant here is not necessarily a decreased physical distance, although de-severance may include the tangibility of distance understood as a measurable reality. Rather, the phenomenon of *de-severing* relates to one's availability for practical activity. The 'near-by-ness' of some realities is counterpointed with the state in which these realities are readily available. Diminishing the role of the physical, Heidegger proposes a far subtler insight into the dichotomy of closeness and remoteness, which differs from a traditional, Cartesian understanding of space. Heidegger's gloss on space, which is attuned to a more delicate and nuanced perception, accounts for a vaster range of responses to the spatiality of being in the world. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf invites us to reconsider the closeness/remoteness and separateness/connectedness dichotomies. Clarissa dwells in a time and space that are remote. However, it is precisely in this spatio-temporal reality that the sense of disconnectedness vanishes. The spatial remoteness of the seaside (she imagines herself to be "… far out to the sea…") and the inaccessibility in time (Clarissa's youth) vanish as those two milieus: the seashore and the family home are exactly what Clarissa's consciousness holds as readily available.

## 3. *The intricacies of belongingness. Homelessness and home-seeking*

If the narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* focuses on the relationship between material and spiritual realms, it equally engagingly investigates the disparity between the corporeal and spiritual be-*longing*. The clash between materiality and spirituality is potently evoked in the images of Clarissa's London walks. Enjoying a city stroll in her thoughts, she either visits the seaside (her soul seems to hone an unflagging attachment to the seascape) or dwells in the remote past when she was a young girl in her family home in Bourton. In her love of London walks, Clarissa resembles Woolf herself and is her stand-in. For Woolf, London is the place that "… perpetually attracts, stimulates, gives [her] a play & a story & a poem, without any trouble, save that of moving [her] legs through the streets" (D3: 186). Clarissa's mental dwelling betokens, at the same time, her sense of belonging. The phenomenon of be-*longingness* encompasses human longing: the passionate yearning for the place one loves, is fascinated with, cherishes as a former dwelling, or desires as a place of the future dwelling. Emotionally, Clarissa belongs wholly to the past, when life seemed to be easier and promising happiness.

The narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* reveals that the interrelation between (be)longingness and space—a spatially determined sense of rootedness or uprootedness—is reflected in the tension between communicability and incommunicability, as that which is communicated is just the surface level of the understanding of human existence. The

novel shows that a sense of belongingness is conveyed via the incommunicable—Clarissa belongs there where her words cannot reach. Her existential situation is one of an acute detachment from the reality she seemingly belongs to. Repressed, playing the role of a hostess and a social artisan, she imagines herself enjoying the freedom of the world not confined to her place of dwelling (her London house)—the seashore symbolizes for her a vaster perspective of life: "She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, far out to the sea and alone" (MD 6). Significantly, the narrative proposes an understanding of belongingness as a poignant sense of *longing* rather than a blissful and facile identification with a particular place. Furthermore, the sense of belongingness in the novel overlaps with that of *home-seeking*.

*Mrs. Dalloway* evokes Heideggerian notions of homelessness and homecoming.[12] The first level of Heidegger's understanding of *not-being-at-home* as reflected in Woolf's novel is related to the portrayal of Clarissa's perception of her existence as profoundly fragmented and uprooted, which is indicative of a deep sense of incompletion and an impossibility to ever attain completion. Descriptions of Clarissa's place of dwelling pinpoint the acuteness of her sense of not being-at-home. On the one hand, the minute details show the physical tangibility of dwelling, on the other, they reveal Clarissa's inner sensation of not belonging. For instance, the hall in her house is compared to a vault, which is suggestive of death, descent, and degeneration. It was "… cool as a vault. Mrs. Dalloway raised her hand to her eyes, and, as the maid shut the door, and she heard the swish of Lucy's skirts, she felt like a nun who has left the world and feels fold round her the familiar veils and the response to old devotions" (MD 25). The darkness and unpleasantness of the vault deconstruct the expected safety and coziness of the hall as the entrance to other rooms in the house. The rich symbolism of disintegration at the first level takes us to the second layer of meaning. The state of homelessness implies more than not dwelling in a building, understood in material terms. Clarissa's way of dwelling symbolizes her unremitting search for a home, for something she does not comprehend. Nonetheless, this something occupies her mind as she craves the fulfillment of her needs and longings associated with being-at-home.

Clarissa's predicament is that of an influential and affluent woman who is mentally homeless; the evanescent, perishable joys of restless socializing turn out to be created along faulty lines; they do not bring

[12] Simone's Heideggerian study of Woolf's *oeuvre* emphasizes the novelist's understanding of the notion of home and homelessness as resonating with Heidegger's: "As Woolf's textual representations repeatedly demonstrate, for the outsider located with society, a relentless sense of homelessness is not necessarily to attached to any particular space or place; rather, this mode of Being is indicative of such an individual's overarching sense of Being-in-the-world" (Simone 2017: 103). In this part of the essay, I point to the ontological perspective of home-seeking as the core of Woolf's hermeneutic understanding of a human being as an internal émigré in search for home that is to become hers.

her any closer to being-at-home. However, Woolf's understanding of homelessness and home-seeking surpasses this first level of apprehension—Clarissa's not being at ease at the place of her dwelling. What happens is not only a particular kind of awkwardness, but rather Clarissa experiences homesickness that can never be satisfied as it is essential to her way of being in the world. Woolf's embodiment of homelessness resonates with Heidegger's philosophy, which illuminates the state of existential homelessness in its search for the lasting sense of dwelling—the very essence of dwelling. Heidegger emphasizes a human being's continuous journey to reach home; this peripatetic aspect is crucial. As we are alienated from Being and are searching for Being, we are also away from home and searching for a home:

> A human being experiences alienation from Being and is constantly in search of Being. Throughout the history of Being's concealment and disclosure, the human being is on the *path away from home.* Calculative thinking is a mode of being in the realm of homelessness in a world devoid of God. Heidegger understands the human being as essentially itinerant, underway, on a journey home, in search of the essence of dwelling (Wierciński 2019: 253).

Crucially, in her disappointment with life and the poignant feeling of barrenness, Clarissa is on her journey to understand her *not-being-at-home-yet*. Her existence is shown as if enveloped in a thick fog that conceals the truth about Being and disables her from self-understanding. Clarissa's sense of not belonging is not only phenomenological but ontological as she exists in the state of oblivion to Being.

A closer examination of Heidegger's explanation of the phenomenon of homelessness indicates that we are always exposed to the forgetfulness of our connection to Being, rather than being able to overcome the hiddenness of Being:

> Homelessness is, for Heidegger, the condition of a human being painfully exposed to the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the forgetfulness of Being, which is the forgetfulness of our own belonging to Being: *Seinsvergessenheit* is *Seinsverlassenheit*. Homelessness is the dwelling between Being's self-concealment and our inability to address the truth of Being, not by overcoming its hiddenness (which was the task of Western metaphysical thinking), but by accepting the lack of its total transparency for us and welcoming its withdrawal (Wierciński 2010: 232).

The narrative's constant shifting backwards and forwards in time heightens the sense of a search for home. Clarissa is both attached to and detached from her earthly home. She searches for a deeper understanding of a possible attachment to her earthly dwelling and for what is beyond it.

Mrs. Dalloway is an exile who does not remain in oneness with the life that she lives and banishes herself from the possibility of living life to its fullest, to understand its very core. As an internal émigré, she is doomed to never experience the joys of unity between outer and inner reality. Heidegger's philosophy of human finitude cogently describes the

state of being an exile and the need to free oneself from an acute sense of being separated from one's home. Heidegger prioritizes meditative thinking (*besinnliches Nachdenken*) over calculative thinking *(rechnendes Denken*). The former has the power to put us on the right path to recovering from our sense of homelessness. Our quest for dwelling cannot be scathed by paying our full attention to technological advancement or metaphysics (Heidegger 1973: 109; cf. e.g., Wierciński 2010: 231), but rather, it should focus on the seeking-of-our-home. Clarissa's journey through time is shown as re-iterative; she moves in circles, shifting back in time and moving forward to inhabit anew the present time. And this scheme powerfully emphasizes her search for a genuine attachment to her place of dwelling and the worrisome seeking of the consummation of her longing to belong, to find a home. Her way of thinking subscribes to the Heideggerian proposal of a specific sense of attachment. Quoting Heidegger's words, Wierciński points to the philosopher's inimitable way of understanding attachment: "In our detached attachment to the world, we must discover that 'it is one thing just to use the earth, another to receive the blessing of the earth and to become at home in the law of this reception to shepherd the mystery of Being and watch over the inviolability of the possible'" (Wierciński 2010: 231).

The pursuit of fulfillment is powerfully evoked in the novel via the juxtaposition of the inner and outer state of being. The embodiment of the potent (dis)connection between the interior and exterior takes on a special value in the narrative's well-pronounced discrepancy between Clarissa's inner life and her persona—the outer realization of self. This clash is coterminous with the rendition of space in the narrative. Clarissa's London residence is both the source of joy because of the excitement of her social life and the source of her spiritual suffocation, the agony of her solitary soul. Anticipating the aura of the forthcoming event of the party, the initial lines of the novel introduce us to the ultimacy of Clarissa's intense delight and exhilaration: "The doors will be taken off their hinges. … And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach. What a lark! What a plunge!" (MD 1). Taking the doors off their hinges to provide more room has a deeper symbolic meaning; not only does this show Clarissa's need for a vaster, more spacious place for her party, but a desire for an ample, capacious way of being, her wish to expand 'self' and to authenticate her life. The physical unhinging can also symbolize one that happens on a psychical level—going deranged, unbalanced, irrational—the letting loose of the otherwise constrained mind, which does occur when Clarissa contemplates the death of a stranger, a mentally disturbed war veteran, Septimus Warren. Significantly, the narrative offers a deeper level of understanding of the presence/absence dichotomy: the profound sensation of being more at home (understanding more) because of witnessing trauma.

## 4. *Presence, absence, and the authentic life*

Throughout the novel, Mrs. Dalloway's presence is shown in terms of *absence* rather than a real presence—she is present in her body for that which happens but is absent in her soul. The flimsy barrier between being-there and non-being is rendered in the narrative's focus on the pronouncement of Clarissa's inner life. Her interior world is stranded between two divergent poles that express her two opposite drives: being on her own and socializing. In depicting Mrs. Dalloway's struggle to be spiritually present, Woolf alludes to the tenets of the Western philosophy of solitude. In classical and Christian tradition solitude is viewed as something that takes us to tranquility, as the space where one can find one's authentic self. Western thought also embraces the Enlightenment view which accentuates that the most powerful remedy for a human being and the space where one can find the truth is socializing—being in dialogue with others, the appraisal of which can be traced back to ancient Greece and the common practice of conversing with friends as the perfect mode of being (see *The Philosophy of Solitude* (2014) Melvyn Bragg in conversation with Melissa Lane, Simon Blackburn, and John Haldane).

*Mrs. Dalloway* endorses Heidegger's understanding of Being as presence and his philosophical stand on absence.[13] Andrew Hass emphasizes that for Heidegger, absence is a mode of presence: "Being is not just present or presence, but also absence or absent. So, being absent is a way of being, not merely a privation. This necessitates destruction or deconstruction, or de-structuring of the history of philosophy for Heidegger" (Hass 2018: 3). The narrative forefronts absence rather than presence; presence is continually satiated with absence. Clarissa remains hardly present to the flow of the present time, rather, she dwells in the seemingly more fulfilling past, which promised future happiness, and which is no longer existent, and thus dwelling in it can be viewed as a spectral presence. However, something other than the phantom presence is meant here. Clarissa's awareness of the lingering energy of life, which she perceives as active in the past, causes her to be present to it while being absent to her current dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Being absent to the present does not merely reflect a psychologically grounded truth about a human being who seems to be lacking contentment with what is happening at present. Most importantly, the narrative reveals that absence is the time of waiting for presence as a revelation of Being. And, thus, 'presence in absence' is the moment of awakening when 'the now' breaks through, both revealing and conceal-

[13] Hass explicates Heidegger's inimitable take on presence thus: "[T]he history of philosophy translated Aristotle's original understanding of being, which he called ousia as 'substance'. So we remained in the history of philosophy wedded or loyal to this translation of ousia and couldn't see that this was actually a mistranslation. The translation should have been 'presence.' This is Heidegger's contribution to the history of being, because he understands that being is presence" (Hass 2018).

ing Being. The narrative shows the paradox of the 'now' which rests on the interplay of the concealment and unconcealment of Being. In the moment of the surrender to the 'now,' Clarissa inhabits an awakening to Being on the ontological level.

The question of presence and absence in the novel interweaves with the issue of authenticity. Clarissa lacks a more authentic and alive happiness, deeper than the surface enjoyment and extravagance of throwing parties. Without a shadow of a doubt, the image of a vault, which suggests the idea of death, is carefully selected to express the heroine's empty, soulless, and rather sad way of being. The veneer of her rich social life masks the barrenness and disillusionment of her adult life. There is a clear allusion here to the Gospel image of the whited sepulchre—the beautiful outside that conceals rotten morality, which can be understood more broadly in the novel as a state of dejection, an abyss, or limbo that prevents true contentment and fulfillment.[14]

Although the narrative is not explicit about Clarissa's depressive thoughts, her peculiar agitation, which can be discerned the moment she learns about Septimus' death, reveals that, like the pain-stricken war veteran, she no longer sees life as an ultimate value and fancies the idea of ending it up. Oddly enough, the death of the Other is a source of empowerment, a moment of authenticity, and an important *Kehre* in which she regains her capability of appreciating both life and death.[15] The authenticity that comes with contemplating death leads us back to Heidegger's philosophy of facticity, and specifically to the concept of being-towards-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*). Heidegger makes it clear that our human existence continually remains under the spell of death—our lives are determined by the prospect of death. However, as he claims, it is only through an attentive awareness of death that we can live our lives authentically (see Heidegger 1962: 231–240).

Clarissa's way of being and dwelling is marked by a dearth of authenticity; her superficial existence is narrowed down to an accumulation of sensations that are expected to bring about aliveness, but at their best, they are merely expressive of her high social status. Mrs. Dalloway is rich enough to pursue a life of pleasure and appearances rather than moral values: "Clarissa Dalloway was the quintessence of upper-class English rectitude, if in "upper-class English rectitude" we include the ability to command a considerable household staff; to throw large, lavish parties that seem to have been effortless; to not only charm every guest but to remember every guest's name" (Cunnigham 2019: 3). The question of the authenticity of Clarissa's life is satiated with the eerie sensation that her presence is somehow not succumbing to the common expectations of what it means to be present. One may

[14] See Matt 23: 27 https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/search.php?hs=1&q=whited+sepulchre

[15] I use the term, *die Kehre* (the turn) as an echo of Heidegger's name for his radical shift in thinking after *Being and Time*. Cf. e.g., Martin Heidegger, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/#TurCo. [accessed 16 Apr 2022].

wonder if Mrs. Dalloway's presence is a mindful presence. The answer is two-fold: on the one hand, she is hoping for renewal, the restoration of her physical and mental strength. On the other, her mind is densely enveloped by the thoughts of the past as if never attuned to the demands and rather doubtful bliss of her present married life.

The ending page of the novel emphasizes that Clarissa's embodied presence is triumphant, most desirable, and instantly associated with a sense of fulfillment as it indicates the victory of the depth of feelings: "It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was" (MD 180). She fills the room with her presence—most importantly, her self is now more integrated and connected to the authentic living of life, but this is an image of Clarissa filtered through the eyes of her former suitor, Peter Walsh. Undoubtedly, two sentiments contribute to Mrs. Dalloway's mental composure: the lingering, though unfulfilled, love that she feels for Peter, and her apprehension of trauma—the death of the Other. Her relationship with Peter plays a significant role in Clarissa's display of authenticity; forsaking her true love, she defies the possibility of living an authentic life. Notably, the uncanny closeness of her psyche and that of Septimus, as well as the experience of his death bring her back to an authentic state of being. One could also pose a question about the significance of Clarissa's other close relationship—her youthful love for Sally Seton, which she represses and abandons—for the authenticity of her life (see Haffey 2010). Succumbing to this love would mean flouting Victorian morality, and Mrs. Dalloway is shown as not truly able to transgress the boundary of conventionality, even if that could possibly mean an actualization of her genuine being.

## 5. *Conclusion*

The narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* features the drama of a human being whose life is not only stranded between finitude and infinity but also between belonging and not-belonging, solitude and companionship. Clarissa Dalloway's existential situation is one of an acute detachment from the reality she seemingly belongs to. However, Woolf transcends the cursory understanding of human attachment to and detachment from *home* and makes it into a philosophical issue. Her novel reveals how our temporality and finitude determine the way we view our being-at-home, home-seeking, and homelessness. Clarissa's way of being is shown as fragmented, and her inner life is satiated with recollections of the past. Repeatedly moving in flashbacks to the time of Clarissa's youth, the narrative offers the unfolding of a world of inwardness. The heroine's introspective thoughts direct our attention to the loosening of the barrier between different states of being. Presence and absence seem to be no longer viewed as binary oppositions. In this respect, Woolf's narrative representation of those two different states of being resonates with Heidegger's philosophy of facticity and his view of absence as a mode of presence.

The one-of-a-kind addressing of the (dis)unity of presence and absence in the novel is also entangled with the notion of authenticity. The vacillating borderline between being present and being absent invites us to see that an authentic existence relies on the acceptance of a continuous search for a home, understood philosophically, an acknowledgment of the lack of total transparency of our being-here, and an openness to Being revealing itself to us in the interplay of concealment and unconcealment. The quandary of authenticity interlocks with our recognition of the dilemma of incommunicability. Clarissa's complex inner life escapes any easy form of communication with the Other. Words serve their role of expressing the richness of the interior of the human mind and, at the same time, in experiencing our finitude, we are not capable of communicating fully that which resides in the depths of our hearts. This is what Clarissa's condition consists of. Woolf's representation of the spatial dimension of human life in narrative art encourages us to discover that reality is both tremulous and solid, and our human embodiment is fully immersed in the materiality of being-in-the-world, but also transgresses the material and corporeal dimension of being. Woolf's narrative art is the inexhaustible wellspring of knowledge of how to approach the phenomenon of our being-in-the-world, how to understand presence and absence in the light of our human finitude, and how to tackle the fascinating and problematic notion of dwelling in the context of temporality. *Mrs. Dalloway* invites us to delve deeper into our existential situation and modes of dwelling in this world, as well as our burning desire to find a home, belong, and be free of the agony of homelessness.

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# *Observers and Narrators in Fiction Film*

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*In the debate on our engagement with and appreciation of fiction films, the thesis that the viewer of a fiction film imagines observing fictional events, and the thesis that these events are imagined to be presented by a narrator, are usually taken as two components of one theoretical package, which philosophers such as George Wilson and Jerrold Levison defend, while philosophers such as Gregory Currie and Berys Gaut reject. This paper argues that the two theses can be disentangled and investigates their logical connection. The investigation shows that the second thesis entails the first but there is no entailment the other way around. Endorsing the first thesis is thus compatible with two options, namely endorsing the second thesis or abandoning it. However, the paper argues that if we endorse the first thesis, endorsing the second provides us with a more compelling explanation of our engagement with and appreciation of fiction films.*

**Keywords:** Fiction; narrative; film; imagination; narrator; fictional world; imagining seeing.

## 1. *Introduction*

The philosophical debate on the audience's engagement with fiction films focuses on two theses, namely, the Imagined Observer Thesis (IOT) and the Film Narrator Thesis (FNT). Philosopher such as George Wilson (1986, 2011), Jerrold Levinson (1993, 1996), Gregory Currie (1995) and Berys Gaut (2010) consider these theses crucial to understand the peculiar experiential and cognitive response that fiction films are meant to elicit from their audience. The two theses can be expressed as follows:

(IOT) Viewers of fiction films are meant to imagine being observers of fictional events.
(FNT) Viewers of fiction films are meant to imagine that fictional events are told by a narrator.

My raw intuition is that the two theses are incompatible, and that (IOT) is true while (FNT) is false. When I ask my students to express their intuitions on these theses (before sharing mine with them), their answers tend to converge with mine. Although that is surely not a proper piece of experimental philosophy, such convergence of intuitions seems to suggest that when one reflects on one's experience as a viewer of fiction films, one has the impression of having enjoyed a perceptual experience of fictional events, but not the impression that those events were told by a narrator. Indeed, we might add, one does not have the latter impression precisely because one does have the former. Since the film viewer imagines seeing fictional events, she does not need a film narrator who would tell those events to her, just as she does not need a "real-life narrator" who would tell her what she sees in everyday life.

However, in the philosophical debate things go differently. On the one hand, philosophers such as Wilson and Levinson argue that (IOT) and (FNT) are both true. On the other hand, philosophers such as Currie and Gaut argue that the two theses are both false. Despite disagreeing on what is true and what is false, philosophers seem to agree on rejecting the intuition that, if (IOT) is true, then (FNT) should be false. Indeed, in the philosophical debate, the (IOT) and (FNT) are so intertwined that they are sometime criticized or defended as if they were one, as if they had to stand or fall together (cf. Levinson 1993; Currie 1995; Gaut 2010; Livingston 2013; Curran 2019). A notable exception is Mario Slugan (2019a: 110, 2019b: 174), who disentangles (IOT) from (FNT) though he expresses skepticism about both theses.

In this paper, I would like to explore the logical connection between the two theses rather than arguing for or against them. I will neither defend nor reject (IOT), but I will investigate whether endorsing (IOT) involves endorsing also (FNT), as philosophers seem to think, or, instead, involves rejecting (FNT), as the above-mentioned intuitions suggest. I will argue for a middle ground: endorsing (IOT) does not involve rejecting (FNT), unlike what intuitions suggest, but the connection between (IOT) and (FNT) is less tight than what philosophers have so far assumed. When one endorses (IOT), both the endorsement and the rejection of (FNT) are available theoretical options. However, I will argue, the endorsement of (FNT) is a preferable option because it offers a more compelling explanation of our engagement with and appreciation of fiction films.

## 2. *The imagined observer thesis*

The theoretical background of (IOT) is a conception of fiction as prescription to imagine (see Walton 1990; Currie 1990). This background

is shared by both the philosophers who defend (IOT) and those who reject it. Thus, the discussion about (IOT) is a controversy on whether the imaginative project that the film viewer is meant to implement involves not only imaginings about fictional characters and events but also imaginings about the viewer herself. In sum, according to (IOT), the viewer imagines not only that fictional characters exist, and fictional events occurs, but also that, in the fiction, she observes them.

All this helps us to explain why the intuition in favor of (IOT) might be misleading. (IOT) does not limit itself to claiming that the viewer has the impression of perceiving fictional events. If the intuition of favor of (IOT) relied only on that impression, what the intuition suggests could not settle the philosophical debate on (IOT).

What (IOT) claims is rather that the impression of perceiving fictional events is included into the imaginative project whereby the viewer is meant to enjoy the film as a fiction. The defenders of (IOT) might insist that the viewer's impression of perceiving fictional events *supports* the truth of the thesis, *assuming that* the viewer is inclined to import this impression into her imaginative project. Yet, the critics of (IOT) precisely deny the latter assumption.

The debate involves both a normative and a descriptive reading of (IOT). According to the normative reading, (IOT) specifies what film viewers should do in the framework of fiction as a cultural practice. However, what a cultural practice such as fiction prescribes is not something that one might find in written laws or user manuals. Rather, the normativity of cultural practices lies in attitudes and habits of practitioners. Therefore, individuating the norms that govern a certain practice involves providing a correct description of it which might highlight not only features of it which the practitioners are aware of but also tacit assumptions that remain implicit in it. In this sense, (IOT)—just as (FNT), as we shall see—has not only a normative component but also a descriptive component: it is a thesis on what the (ideal) viewer *should do* based on what (actual) viewers *have done and keep doing*. (IOT) thus concerns the viewer's rules of engagement, as it where, but these rules are grounded in actual practices.

To clarify the controversy on (IOT), let me consider an example. In the opening scene of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, the viewer sees the hero, Scottie, slipping off a roof. Both the defenders and the critics of (IOT) agrees that the viewer is meant to imagine that Scottie slips off a roof. In other words, it is fictional—it is true in the fiction—that Scottie slips off a roof. The controversy is whether the viewer is also meant to imagine that she herself, as a fictional observer, sees Scottie slipping off a roof. Is her perceptual experience of Scottie's slipping fictional in the same sense in which that slipping is so?

At this point, intuitions seem to go against (IOT). If a viewer of *Vertigo* should tell the story of Scottie, she would hardly mention her presence as an observer when Scottie slipped off the roof. Her perceptual

experience of that event does not seem to belong to the fictional world in which the event occurs. Currie (1995) relies also on this intuition to argue that (IOT) is false. Yet, the defender of (IOT) is not committed to the claim that the viewer as an imagined observer belongs to the same fictional world to which fictional events like Scottie's slipping belong. Slugan (2019a, 111; 2019b 201) interprets Wilson's epistemology of film as committed to that claim but, as we shall see, Wilson's theses can be also interpreted in a way that avoids that commitment.

According to Kendall Walton (1990, 2015), each fiction involves two fictional worlds, which he calls the "Story World" and the "Game World". The former is the world in which fictional events occur while the latter is the world in which the viewer, as a fictional observer, can perceive those events. Scottie's slipping occurs in both worlds, but the imagined observer sees it only in the Game World, not in the Story World.

We might say that the Game World is constituted by the Story World plus a further ontological region which is a sort of observatory on the Story World. From there, one can observe a world to which one does not belongs. Stefano Predelli calls such region "the Periphery" of the Story World (2020: 47). The imagined observer figuring in (IOT) is a denizen of the Periphery whom I will name "the Observer". In sum, the film viewer located in the actual world is meant to imagine seeing events that occur in the Story World by playing the role of the Observer in the Periphery of the latter world.

The controversy on (IOT) does not concern whether the Observer belongs to the Story World but rather whether we really need to posit the Observer, the Periphery, and the Game World to explain our engagement with fiction films. Although the defenders and the critics of (IOT) may agree that the Observer does not belong to the Story World, the disagreement remains on whether the Story World is all that the viewer is meant to imagine or she is meant to also imagine a Periphery, and to locate herself there as the Observer. If we want to afford a compelling explanation of our engagement with fiction films, do we really need the Periphery and the Observer as its inhabitant? This is, I contend, the best way of casting the controversy on (IOT) as a genuine philosophical debate. Moreover, this approach also enables us to properly characterize the debate on (FNT), as I will show next.

## 3. *The film narrator thesis*

Narrators are fictional agents—possibly, fictional counterparts of actual authors—who are meant to supply information about fictional events. Some fiction films have *explicit* narrators. For example, in Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* the story is told by the voice over of an omniscient narrator, played by the actor Michael Hordern. Explicit narrators like that are not controversial. In fact, (FNT) states more than this. According to (FNT), narrators play a role also in films such

as Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* that do not exploit voice overs or analogous stylistic devices to indicate explicit narrators. Such *implicit* narrators are controversial. Defenders of (FNT) argue that implicit narrators play a key role in our engagement with fiction films. Critics of (FNT), on the other hand, argue that implicit narrators are just cumbersome philosophical speculations that play no interesting explanatory role as regards film experience.

The debate on implicit narrators also concerns literary fictions that lack an explicit narrator endowed with a recognizable psychological profile (see Kania 2005, 2007; Alward 2007, 2009). There is, however, a rationale for positing implicit narrators in literature that does not apply to the case of film. Although novels are made of sentences that authors have written as *prescriptions* to imagine, a reader who engages imaginatively with a novel is rather inclined to cast those sentences as assertions that describe fictional events. Manuel García-Carpintero (2022) calls this "a first phenomenological motivation for covert narrators", stressing that "it intuitively seems that the contents of third-person narratives are reported to us".

This phenomenology of reading bears upon the reader's imaginative project in such a way that, in this project, the subject who utters the sentences cannot be the real writer who indeed makes prescriptions rather than assertions. The reader is thus led to imagine the narrator, that is, the fictional subject—possibly, the fictional counterpart of the real writer—who makes those assertions. Ultimately, the same sentences are assertions of the narrator when considered from within the imaginative project, and prescriptions of the writer when considered from without that project (for an insightful discussion of this issue, see Slugan 2019a: 108, 2019b: 191–194).

In literary fiction, both an explicit narrator such as Barry Lyndon in William Thackeray's *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* and an alleged implicit narrator like that of Gustave Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale* make linguistic assertions about the fictional world. Yet, when it comes to films, things are quite different. The omniscient explicit narrator who replaces Barry Lyndon in Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of Thackeray's novel also makes linguistic assertions which describe the fictional world, but the alleged implicit narrator who would describe the fictional world of Fellini's *La dolce vita* surely is not making linguistic assertions, otherwise there would be something like a voice over to vehiculate them, but nothing like that can be heard in that film.

All this seems to motivate the intuition that (FNT) is false. If a narrator is a fictional agent who makes linguistic assertions to describe the fictional world, there is no narrator in fiction films in which there is no voice asserting anything. Yet, the defenders of (FNT) have a way of addressing this issue. They can argue that the implicit film narrator does not make linguistic assertions but rather pictorial assertions, that is, assertions that have pictures instead of words as their vehicle.

The rationale for the implicit narrator in film, from this perspective, resembles that for the implicit narrator in literature. Filmmakers use pictures to prescribe imaginings but, when the viewer engages with her imaginative project, she is inclined to cast these pictures as pictorial assertions on the fictional world rather than as pictorial prescriptions, thereby attributing them to the implicit film narrator instead of to the filmmaker.

Still, this argument in favor of (FNT) seems to be in tension with (IOT). According to the latter thesis, the viewer imagines *seeing* fictional things. If "seeing" here means "ordinary seeing", pictures play no role in the viewer's imaginative engagement. In ordinary perception, indeed, we have the impression of directly seeing things, not pictures of things (cf. Strawson 1979). Hence, the way in which the viewer imagines seeing fictional things prevents one from positing the film narrator.

To sum up, both literature and film may involve a Periphery, but what there is in the Periphery seems to be different. In literature, the Periphery has two denizens. First, the Narrator, who makes linguistic assertions about the Story World. Second, the imaginary counterpart of the reader, namely "the Narratee" (Prince 1985), who pays attention to the Narrator's assertions, thereby gathering information about the Story World. In film, on the other hand, the Periphery seems to be inhabited only by the imaginary counterpart of the viewer, namely the Observer, who directly sees events in the Story World without the need of any narrator who would describe them through pictorial assertions.

## 4. *How to reconcile the observer with the narrator*

Relying on intuitions, one might be tented to conclude that (IOT) refutes (FNT), instead of entailing it as both defenders and critics of (IOT) are inclined to assume. Yet, two strategies for defending the compatibility between the truth of (IOT) and that of (FNT) remain available.

The first strategy consists in interpreting (IOT) as the claim that the viewer imagines seeing pictures that visually record fictional events. Just as the reader of a novel reads sentences that are prescriptions to imagine as if they were assertions about the fictional world, thereby playing the role of the Narratee, the viewer of a fiction film sees pictures that are prescriptions to imagine as if they were recordings of fictional events, thereby playing the role of the Observer. As Wilson puts it, "we imagine motion picture shots as motion picture shots [...], but as motion picture shots for which the fictions they construct are real" (2011: 51). From this perspective, the Narrator becomes the subject who has produced and assembled those visual (and possibly auditory) recordings: the "Grand Imagier", as Wilson dubs him or her, borrowing the term from Christian Metz and Albert Laffay (Wilson 2011: 29). If (IOT) claims that we imagine that the pictures we see on the screen are recordings of fictional events, (FNT) adds that the Narrator is the

Grande Imagier who, in our imaginative project, provides us with those recordings. Hence, (IOT) does no longer refute (FNT). Indeed, the former nicely complements the latter.

The second strategy consists, instead, in interpreting (IOT) as the claim that the viewer imagines directly seeing fictional events, not visual recordings of fictional events. However, this interpretation of (IOT) does not commit itself to the claim that the viewer also imagines that her body is located at the standpoints from which she sees fictional events. In other words, the viewer imagines seeing from within the fictional space without imagining that her body is within that space. Wilson in his 1986 offers a simile that may help to clarify this interpretation of (IOT): the Observer is like the immaterial and imperceptible occupant of an immaterial and imperceptible capsule, which can freely move and jump within the fictional spacetime. This simile also helps us to figure out the role of the Narrator in this imaginative framework: the Narrator is the subject who moves or displaces the Observer's capsule within the fictional spacetime. In this case, the Narrator is not a "Grand Imagier" who produces visual recordings of fictional events but rather an "Audio-visual Presenter" (Chatman 1990) or "Perceptual Enabler" (Levinson 1996) who directly provides the Observer with viewpoints on those events. This scenario also enables us to reconcile (IOT) with (FNT) by casting the Narrator as the source of the Observer's perceptual access to the fictional world.

At this point, one might object that both strategies rely on somehow metaphorical readings of (IOT). In the Grand-Imagier strategy, the viewer imagines seeing fictional events through *a sort of* visual recording of them. In the Perceptual-Enabler strategy, the viewer imagines seeing fictional events through *a sort of* immaterial and imperceptible capsule. Metaphors such as the visual recording and the immaterial capsule, if taken literally, generate absurd imaginings which critics of (IOT) and (FNT) such as Currie (1995), Gaut (2010), Carroll (2016), and Curran (2019) have aptly stressed. For example, one might wonder how visual recordings can be made if no camera was present where fictional events occurred, or which technology made possible the construction of the immaterial capsule. Trying to answer these questions within the viewer's imaginative project surely leads to absurd imaginings.

Defenders of (IOT) and (FNT) usually reply by stating that these are "silly questions" which do not deserve any answer within the imaginative project (see Wilson 2011; Curran 2016). Yet, a reason why these questions are "silly" is to be offered. I argue that these questions are silly because they wrongly turn metaphors aimed to describe the Periphery of the Story World into features of that world. In fact, there are neither visual recordings nor immaterial capsules within the Story World. There is just a Periphery from which that world can be seen in peculiar ways. These ways of seeing are unavailable both in our actual world and in the Story World, but become available in the Periphery

which, as such, is metaphysically anomalous with respect to both the actual world and the Story World. The Observer and the Narrator are denizens of the Periphery, not of the Story World. The visual recording and the immaterial capsule are only rhetorical attempts to illustrate the "peripherical" ways of seeing in terms of worldly objects such as recordings and capsules. Yet, what matters are not those objects, but just the peripherical ways of seeing that the objects illustrate. Those objects are like the ladder in Wittgenstein's remark concerning the reader of his *Tractatus*: "he must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it" (Wittgenstein 1922: 6.54). Once the ladder (that is, the visual recording or the immaterial capsule) is thrown away, silly questions reveal all their silliness.

## 5. *The narrator and the filmmaker*

Even if one acknowledges that the visual recordings and the immaterial capsule are nothing but rhetorical devices which do not threaten the consistency of (IOT), one may still insist on the dispensability of the Narrator. Specifically, one might argue that the viewer imagines seeing fictional events but, in her imaginative project, the way in which perceptual access to those events is given to her might remain indeterminate (cf. Slugan 2019a: 110, 2019b: 200). Thus, imagining being the Observer of fictional events does not entail imagining the Narrator as the source of those events. (IOT) does not entail (IST). Theater is a case in which imagining the Observer without imagining the Narrator seems to be quite plausible. The viewer of a play can imagine seeing fictional events without the need of a further imagining concerning an agent who would enable her to see those events. The events are just there, in front of her, to be seen (cf. Williams 1973).

Still, the medium of film has specific features that the medium of theater lacks, namely, framing and editing, which enable films to change the Observer's point of view in a way that is not available to plays. To properly understand a fiction film, the viewer should acknowledge that the change of her point of view is the effect of an intentional action taken by a rational subject for communicative purposes. The viewer is imaging seeing a certain fictional event from a given viewpoint and suddenly the viewpoint changes because of a camera movement or editing. Hence, the viewer can wonder why this happened thereby acknowledging that somebody intentionally did so to help her to better understand what is going on in the fictional world. For example, when a cut replaces a closeup of a character with a shot of an object, the viewer is entitled to infer that the character is looking at that object. The so-called Kuleshov effect exploits this inference to trigger a further inference concerning affective states: if what follows the close-up of a man is a shot of a bowl of soup, the man might feel hunger; if it is a shot of a coffin, he might feel grief; if it is a shot of a woman, he might feel desire (see Prince and Hensley 1992).

Changes in point of view can also license inferences concerning spatial and temporal distances. For example, when a cut replaces a viewpoint on a character walking in the street with a viewpoint on that character sitting in her armchair at home, the viewer is entitled to infer that some time has passed, and in the meanwhile the character arrived home. The temporal distance can even be a vast one, as in the bone-to-spaceship cut in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which entitles the viewer to infer not only that much time has passed, but also that a genealogical connection holds between the two objects: the bone is the starting point of a historical development whose end point is the spaceship.

Relying on Paul Grice's (1989) account of communication, one might say that there is a cooperative communicative activity involving the Observer and the Narrator (cf. Donati 2006; Kobow 2007; Pignocchi 2015). When the point of view undergoes a change, the Observer is entitled to wonder why the Narrator did that, under the assumption that the Narrator is cooperating with her thereby helping her to properly understand what is going on in the Story World. Such reflection on the reason why the Observer's viewpoint has changed enables her to gather further pieces of information about the fictional world that would not be accessible if she limited herself to perceiving from the given viewpoints. If a cut links a closeup of a character to a shot of an object, the Observer can directly see the character, and then the object, but the fact that the character is looking at the object is to be inferred under the assumption that the Narrator has changed the viewpoint to help the Observer to better understand the story. Likewise, in the example of the cut linking the street to the house, the Observer can directly see the character walking in the street, and then the character sitting in the armchair, but the fact that the character arrived home in the meanwhile is to be inferred under the assumption that the Narrator is guiding the Observer in the exploration of the Story World. The same assumption, in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, enables one to infer, from the bone-to-spaceship cut, that the spaceship is the ultimate effect of a historical process originated by the bone.

Samuel Cumming, Gabriel Greenberg and Rory Kelly (2017) have argued that the meaning of some changes of viewpoint in film can be explained in terms of general semantic conventions rather than in terms of context-dependent pragmatic mechanisms such as those described above. Yet, even if one assumes, for the sake of the argument, that those authors are right, the fact remains that the alleged semantic conventions cannot exhaust the meaning of all changes of viewpoint in film. Specifically, Cumming, Greenberg, and Kelly individuate conventions that would govern changes of viewpoint aimed to explore a certain environment, but there are other changes of viewpoint that essentially depend on context-dependent factors, and therefore cannot be satisfactorily explained in terms of semantic conventions. No semantic

convention, for example, can enable viewers of Fritz Lang's *M* to infer, from the cut that links a woman setting the table for lunch to a little girl leaving school, that the woman is waiting for her daughter. Viewers can draw that inference only by presupposing that the scenes are shown to them by a *rational agent* who is intentionally cooperating with them for communicative purposes.

(FNT) identifies this *rational agent* with the Narrator. To grasp the meaning of the peculiar changes of viewpoint that are crucial to film experience, the viewer should imagine not only that she is the Observer of fictional events, as (IOT) states, but also that the Narrator is providing her with viewpoints on those events. Here is a sense in which endorsing (IOT) may lead one to endorse also (FNT).

It might be objected, however, that (FNT) is not required to make sense of the changes of viewpoint since the viewer can grasp the meaning of those changes simply by conceiving of the filmmaker as a rational agent who is helping her to understand fictional events. The viewer imagines being the Observer, as (IOT) states, but when the viewpoint changes the viewer can make sense of this by considering her actual cooperation with the filmmaker rather than the imaginary cooperation between the Observer and the Narrator. Hence, endorsing (IOT) would not lead to endorsing also (FNT).

Still, the combination of (IOT) with (FNT) seems to have an explanatory advantage compared to the combination of (IOT) with the actual cooperation between viewer and filmmaker. Both combinations enable the viewer to properly draw inferences from changes in viewpoint, but only the former enables the viewer to do so *within* her imaginative project.

If (IOT) is combined with (FNT), the viewer can draw inferences from changes in viewpoints while she is playing the role of the Observer. For example, she imagines seeing the gaze of the character and then the object, and, by relying on the cooperative stance of the Narrator, she can infer that the character is looking at the object.

If, instead, (IOT) is combined with cooperation between viewer and filmmaker, the viewer is forced to consider the character as the performance of an actor, and the object as a piece of production design, despite imagining seeing the character and the object as fictional entities. That is because interacting with the filmmaker, who is the agent who created fictional entities, forces the viewer to cast these entities as created in our actual world instead of as existing in the Story World. The viewer is thus forced to give up the role she was playing, namely the Observer, thereby temporarily going back from her Game World to the actual world.

Interacting with the Narrator, on the other hand, does not have this shortcoming. The Narrator is the agent who provides the Observer with information about fictional entities, not the agent who created them. Hence, while interacting with the Narrator, the viewer can keep

playing the role of the Observer thereby preserving her place in the Periphery.

The same point can be made by considering that most fiction films are made in a way that leads the viewer to focus on fictional events rather than on actual actors and settings. As Robert Hopkins (2008) aptly points out, the viewer of a fiction film is led to experience a photographic representation of fictional events even though she rather faces a photographic representation *of a staged representation* of fictional events. In the viewer's experience, the staged tier disappears—or, in Hopkins' terms, collapses. Yet, if the viewer should interact with the filmmaker to infer meaning from changes of viewpoint, the staged tier would systematically reappear. Since fiction films are carefully crafted to remove the staged tier from the viewer's experience, it would be odd to restore this tier each time that meaningful changes of viewpoint occur. (IOT) and (FNT) avoids this odd consequence by enabling the viewer to play the role of the Observer and to draw inferences by interacting with the Narrator.

If all this is right, the combination of (IOT) with (FNT) helps the viewer to preserve the continuity of her imaginative project in which she imagines being the Observer. Giving up (FNT), instead, would threat such continuity by breaking the imaginative engagement with fiction when changes of viewpoint occur.

## 6. *The narrator's contribution to the aesthetic appreciation of fiction films*

The changes of viewpoint due to camera movements and editing show that the viewer of a fiction film should appeal to some communicative agency to properly understand the fictional events that, according to (IOT), she imagines seeing. Such communicative agency might be ascribed either to the Narrator, as (FNT) states, or to the filmmaker. In the previous section, I have argued that the former ascription is preferable since, unlike the latter, it does not force the viewer to break her imaginative project of perceptual exploration of the Story World. Yet, one might object, the main goal of the viewer, from an aesthetic perspective, is not the imaginative exploration of the Story World but rather the appreciation and evaluation of the fiction film as an outcome of human creativity. In this sense, communicative agency is to be ascribed to the filmmaker, not to the Narrator, even if doing so involves temporary breaks of the viewer's imaginative project. Therefore, although (IOT) might stand, (FNT) should fall.

I argue that this objection relies on a too intellectualistic conception of aesthetic appreciation, which mistakenly severs the appreciation of films as artifacts from the exploration of the Story World. If the fiction film is an artifact whose function consists in affording the exploration of the Story World, a proper appreciation of the artifact should be as

close as possible to the enjoyment of the exploration. Hence, what we need is a way of exploring the Story World that can also favor the appreciation of the film as an artifact without the need of relentlessly switching between one activity and the other, which seems to be problematic especially if the film affords immersion. By supplementing the exploration of the Story World with the acknowledgment of an agency that guides this exploration, (FNT) positively contributes to the appreciation of the film as an artifact. Although (FNT) does not involve directly casting the film as an outcome of human creativity, it involves an appreciation of the communicative skills of the narrator which is somehow preliminary to the appreciation of the creative skills of the filmmaker. (FNT) thus throws the seeds of aesthetic appreciation, as it were, in the very middle of the imaginative exploration, thereby bridging the gap between the viewer's exploration of the Story World and her appreciation of the film as an artifact.

Such contribution of (FNT) to aesthetic appreciation can be clarified by deploying the notions of form and content. Following Richard Eldridge (1985), I take "content" to designate things in the narrative, and "form" to designate manipulative operations on the narrative and on the medium whereby it is narrated. Specifically, I call "Content*" individuals, properties, relations and events in the Story World of a fiction film, and "Form*" the manipulations of points of view whereby the Narrator presents those contents to the viewer who plays the role of the Observer.

If one assumes that appreciation involves considering how form configurates content, a first piece of appreciation can already occur within the viewer's imaginative project by considering how Form* configurates Content*. Then, adopting a reflexive attitude toward her imaginative project, the viewer can finalize her appreciation by treating Form* and Content* as the contents of the Game World, namely, Form*-as-Content and Content*-as-Content. These constitute the two dimensions of Content of the fiction film.

In this way, the viewer can finally consider how the film as an artifact configurates its Content through its Form. On the one hand, the Form of a fiction film configurates Content*-as-Content through features such as screenplay, production design, acting and direction, which determine what occurs in the Story World. On the other hand, the Form configurates Form*-as-Content through features such as cinematography and editing, which determine what happens in the Periphery. Following Marcel Vuillaume (1990), one might call what happens in the Periphery "the secondary fiction", as opposed to the "primary fiction" which takes place in the Story World. In this sense, Form* individuates the secondary fiction, just as Content* individuates the primary one.

Once the viewer has individuated Content* by playing the role of the Observer of the primary fiction, and Form* by imaginatively in-

teracting with the Narrator in the secondary fiction, she can finalize her aesthetic appreciation by considering how the Form of the film as an artifact has configurated the two dimensions of its Content. These are Form*-as-Content and Content*-as-Content, which correspond to Form* and Content* respectively, when the latter are considered from without the viewer's imaginative engagement.

If all this is right, the combination of (IOT) and (FNT) affords an aesthetic appreciation of fiction films than can be subtler and more rewarding than that provided by the mere combination of (IOT) with the recognition of the filmmaker's agency. Appreciating a fiction film, from this perspective, it is not just a matter of enjoying the imaginative exploration of the Story World, and then assessing the film as an artifact. Appreciation is already at work during the exploration by virtue of (FNT), which enables the viewer, while playing the role of the Observer, to assess the manipulative activity of the Narrator.

## 7. *Conclusion*

Although there seem to be good reasons to posit the Narrator in literary fictions, the Observer plays no role in them. The imaginative role that the reader of a novel is meant to play is that of the Narratee, who is a subject gathering *linguistic* information about the Story World. The Observer, instead, is a subject who gathers *perceptual* information about the Story World. Arguably, theater and film differ from literature because the imaginative engagement with the former arts involves playing the role of the Observer rather than that of the Narratee.

On the one hand, imagining being the Narratee surely entails imagining interacting with the Narrator since linguistic information should have some agency as its source. On the other hand, imagining being the Observer might not have this consequence. The Observer, in principle, might perceptually explore the Story World on her own. If this were the case, (IOT) would stand but (FNT) would fall. Perhaps the best explanation of our engagement with theater would only require the Observer, not the Narrator. This suggests that the literature, theater, and film are different from a phenomenological perspective since literature involves the Narrator without the Observer, theater involves the Observer without the Narrator, and film involves them both. This comparative proposal is compatible with what I have argued in this paper and is surely worth exploring. However, the aim of my paper was just to investigate how (IOT) and (FNT) are related in film.

(FNT) directly entails (IOT). If the Narrator is the agent who offers perceptual access to the Story World, the Observer is needed as the beneficiary of such access, otherwise the Narrator's activity would be pointless. Yet, I have argued, (IOT) does not directly entail (FNT) since the Observer might have perceptual access to the Story World without any agent giving that access to her, just as we have perceptual access to our environment without any agent giving it to us. Nevertheless, I

have argued, if one endorses (IOT), endorsing (FNT) provides us with a more compelling explanation of our engagement with and appreciation of fiction films.

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# *Fiction and the Real World: The Aesthetic Experience of Theatre*

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*In what sense can aesthetic experience be considered an opportunity for the development of personal identity, cognitive abilities, and emotions? Theatre proves to be an important field of investigation to approach this question. During a theatrical experience, the connection between fiction and reality can take the form of active cooperation between author, actor, and spectator. A better understanding of this point can be drawn by pointing out three kinds of spectator: we can distinguish a critical spectator, an emotional spectator, and an instinctual spectator, who respectively represent: the imaginative and hermeneutic attitude; empathy and fictional emotions; the unconscious satisfaction of drives. So far, a parallel can be established between literature and theatre. However, these two aesthetic experiences are profoundly different: the type of immersion provided by the theatrical experience differs from reading, because the presence of the characters is physical and actual. The pragmatic theatrical framework is the same as that which underlies childhood games. This means that the public too is to some extent called to play, i.e. to act. To appreciate the implications of this thesis, a preliminary analysis of the performance Reality (Deflorian and Tagliarini 2012) is offered, examining how its experience contributes to the development of the spectating subject.*

**Keywords:** Fiction; aesthetic experience; theatre; performance; character; spectator.

## 1. *Fictional activities and subjectivation processing*

In what sense can the aesthetic experience be considered an opportunity for the development of personal identity, cognitive abilities, and the emotional sphere? Theatre proves to be an important field of investigation in order to probe this question. In principle, theatre obliges us to think of the connection between fiction and reality, not only in terms of truth content (that is, of the truthfulness, or verisimilitude, of the story represented), but also in terms of "truth effects" (or "reality effects", that indicate the way the subject changes through fiction). Theatrical fiction interacts with reality through truth effects that affect the viewer, thus triggering certain subjectivation processes. The term "subjectivation" is here employed to indicate the process of becoming a subject, according to Foucault's philosophy (Foucault 1982).

It would be useful to start from Kendall Walton's ideas about imaginative activities in general (mimesis), so as to investigate the effects of theatrical representations, by entering the field of subjectivation processing. Although the term "subjectivation" never appears in Walton, he analyses the formation of subjectivity. Notably, he assigns mimesis a fundamental role in the formation of subjectivity, whose dynamics are traced back to games of "make-believe". He suggests that engaging in make-believe "provides practice in roles one might someday assume in real life, that it helps one to understand and sympathize with others, that it enables one to come to grips with one's own feelings, that it broadens one's perspectives" (Walton 1990: 12). Mimesis and works of fiction are fundamental factors for empathy, for acquiring knowledge of oneself and others. Walton believes that "ordinary representational works of art […] serve as props in games of make-believe" (Walton 2011: 53). Works of art are objects that shape fantasies, designed as supports for particular games in which fictional worlds are built. Just as a baby might play with a doll, we might play with a puppet or a mask, with a costume, or with a prop. Mimetic works have a culturally determined social function through conventions and rules concerning the way in which they are to be enjoyed. Without getting into the details of Walton's argument, which is articulated in many categorical distinctions, it is important to emphasize that the imaginative activity aroused by mimetic works is described as a unique possibility to explore human resources: "Make-believe provides the experience– something like it anyway—for free. Catastrophes don't really occur (usually) when it is fictional that they do. The divergence between fictionality and truth spares us pain and suffering we would have to expect in the real world. We realize some of the benefits of hard experience without having to undergo it" (Walton 2011: 68). *Make-believe* is a field of boundless enrichment of singularity and a powerful training tool: "objectivity, control, the possibility of joint participation, spontaneity, all on top of a

certain freedom from the cares of the real world" (Walton 2011: 68). Therefore, mimesis emerges as a valuable opportunity to undergo subjectivation processes: I can explore very different situations from the one in which I really find myself and test my behavioral skills without running any material danger. Mimesis plays a central role in human cultures. It is sufficient to think that, since the beginning of human history, fictional representations have been continuously produced and consumed. There must therefore be a fundamental need to which this type of work responds.

Jean-Marie Schaeffer attempted to investigate the anthropological foundations of this need in the text *Why fiction?* In this work, he provides various references to the developmental psychology, mental attitudes, psychological mechanisms, and pragmatic assumptions that underlie fictional activities. When human beings find themselves immersed in a work of fiction and are carried away by imaginary passions, they instinctively feel a mixture of fascination and distrust. Rational control runs the risk of being neutralized by fiction to such an extent that it is sometimes necessary to interrupt it, in other words to break the effect of reality and impose a certain distance from the representation. In the absence of such interruptions, there would appear to be the danger of some confusion between fiction and reality. In his condemnation of mimesis, Plato's *The Republic* insists precisely on this hypothesis. However, as Schaeffer notes, Plato's controversy does not take into account the real dynamics that govern the use of fictional works. One can be immersed in a work of fiction and fall victim to an illusion of cognitive attention, without replicating any specific content of the fiction in real life. A theatrical example may be the following one. While watching Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, I may become totally absorbed in Macbeth's drama, I may feel anxious and be moved by the progress of the story, without however nurturing, in my daily life, any desire for power or any violent instinct.

However, I may also decide to imitate certain behaviors I derive from mimetic works, even knowing perfectly well that I am imitating works of fiction. For example, while knowing that Romeo is only a fictional character, I may wish to emulate his madly amorous disposition.

Moreover, Schaeffer suggests that nothing can be emulated except what is likely, namely what is already an emulation of reality in a work of fiction: "Of course, life imitates art (mimetic), but it only imitates what in art (already) imitates life—which always continues to imitate itself" (Schaeffer 1999: 40). In other words, if I decide to imitate Romeo, it is because a romantic attitude was already present in me, even before my encounter with this character. The emulation is not a danger in itself.

Therefore, the risk concerns not those who immerse themselves in fiction, but those who have an underdeveloped imaginative capacity, as some research on developmental psychology has shown. People who

have little imagination and are not used to experimenting with fiction have a more limited space for learning and personal development.

In general, mimetic behaviors favor the development of psychological attitudes from early childhood to adulthood. Mimetic contagion is a form of knowledge, even more fundamental than dialectical reason or rational persuasion. Mimesis is the basis of individuals' mental life, of the humanization of social relations and of the cultural development of society. Far from being a primitive instinct, mimesis is something that contributes to evolution and is present in the world of life in countless forms. Projection activities, make believe, role play, dreams, reveries, fantasies, are all things that can be traced back to mimetic instincts.

## 2. *Literary characters and theatrical characters*

Let us now carry out a theoretical experiment. We will try to analyze what Vincent Jouve calls the effet-personnage ("character-effect"), i.e., the status of the literary character in terms of its truth effects, to underline consonances and dissonances with respect to the truth effects of the theatrical character. First of all, Jouve notes that narratology, formalism and structuralism have always provided a strictly functional definition of the character, thus reducing it to the textual elements that compose it. This operation aims to move beyond the idealistic illusion of the traditional novel, for the character is structurally defined only by the role it plays within the action. According to Jouve's perspective, this approach is not exhaustive, since the character always refers to something which is located beyond the text. In particular, he focuses not on the relationship between author and character, but rather on the relationship between character and reader: an element less widely investigated by standard narratology. Jouve proposes to create a method to carry out his investigation by guaranteeing the intersubjectivity of his results, so that the reception of the character by the reader will not be considered an exclusively private and subjective experience. From the methodological and formal point of view, this theoretical attempt is a paradigm that we can transpose almost literally into theatrical terms, by focusing on the relationships between character and spectator (rather than the reader of the novel).

The *effet-personnage* basically depends on the indications contained in the literary or theatrical text, which is always addressed to an implicit reader, or audience. Indeed, the identity of the character arises from the active cooperation between the reader / spectator and the author: "the character, even if it is given by the text, borrows a certain number of its characterizations from the reader's world of reference" (Jouve 1992: 29). There is a space of uncertainty in the layout of the *personnage* that must be filled by the reader/spectator, owing to the formal and structural limits of both the book and the stage. In order to get an idea of the character, the reader/spectator is forced to draw on his experience, as well as on an inter-textual dimension, namely on other

systems of signs in which he has always been immersed. However, it is never a matter of random uncertainty. The empty spaces are the result of the reflection developed by the author, who sometimes deliberately proceeds in an evolutionary sense, tracing an idea of the character that is gradually filled in only at the end of the narration. Let us think of Simenon's Maigret. The writer only gradually reveals not just the culprit's identity, but also the inspector's personality and in general the real nature of the environment that constitutes the setting (and often the cause) of the crime. In theatre, the most obvious example is Oedipus, whose tragedy is retrospectively reinterpreted in the light of the final revelation of the truth.

The ontological depth of the characters, then, depends on a range of variables which are the same for the literary and the theatrical character. Its essence varies depending on the nature of representation (for the fictional dimension can be more or less accentuated), and the degree of realism put into work (for there are historical characters, and characters whose existence may be probable, possible, or completely improbable). Other factors are the proximity to the reader's culture, the reader's distance from or familiarity with the storytelling style, and the legibility of the characters. Within the literary genre of the novel, there are enormous differences. For example, the incompleteness of fictional universes is deliberately accentuated in Kafka and minimized in Balzac. Likewise, let us think of the different characterizations of Beckett's characters, whose psychology is completely impenetrable, and of Chekhov's characters, with their bursting interiority.

What we have argued so far equally applies to literary and theatrical storytelling. However, there are specific traits in theatrical fiction which clearly distinguish it from literary experience. First of all, text is not an all-embracing factor in theatre. Theatrical mimesis mix (at least) two components: the text and the representation, i.e., the game. The playful element at the basis of theatre is evident—even more so than in the Italian term *gioco*—in the French *jeu*, the English *play*, and in the German *Spiel*. According to Schaeffer's schematization, playful theatricality is qualified by the vector of immersion "substitution d'identité physique" (physical identity substitution), while the immersive disposition is defined as "identification allo-subjective actantielle" (actantial allo-subjective identification) (Schaeffer 1999: 225). This means that in the theatre there is a substitution of physical identity via identification with another acting subject. The spectator identifies with the actor who is performing. The pragmatic theatrical framework is the same as that which underlies childhood games (the actor plays, acts, pretends to be Hamlet), but the purpose is different from normal games. After all, theatre's playfulness is addressed to an audience, and must therefore communicate something also to people who are not participating directly in the game.

## 3. *The actor and the imagination*

It is very significant that Schaeffer defines the type of immersion provided by the theatrical device as "actantielle". Indeed, by contrast to the novel and the cinema, theatre is centered on action, the physical and actual presence of the characters. I do not have to imagine Hamlet: I can see and feel him. Theatrical imagination is stimulated by an action performed by bodies in flesh and blood. The staging is the actualization of a textual fiction; conversely, the theatrical text is the virtualization of a stage actuality. The actualization or the presence of a performative corporeality is configured as a specific trait of the theatrical representation, which is not shared by other mimetic forms.

In order to better define the theatrical character, it is useful to bear in mind that it derives its identity from the cooperation between the author and the spectator, as it is the case with the reader for the literary character. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the fact that in theatre there is the decisive mediation of the actor. The character is not linguistically mediated to the spectator (at least it is linguistically mediated to the actor, as the dramaturgy contains indications on the character), through the linguistic support of the book, but actively mediated, through a representation that unites different voices and bodies in action. One does not get an idea of the theatrical character on the basis of one's imagination. Rather, the inverse process occurs: it is the character represented on stage who becomes part of the spectator's imagination. Of course, this return movement from the work of fiction to the individual imagination can also be found in the literary dimension. However, in theatre this is the only direction that can be taken since the spectator must first of all interact with the concreteness of the actor's voice and features. It is plain that the spectator can add imaginary features to the character, but always on the basis of the body on stage, which immediately embodies it. The spectator may witness various versions of the same play in which the same character is played by different actors, but each time the spectator will immediately have to deal with their individual bodies.

The variety of the performers—an instance of a pivotal distinction between the theatrical character and the cinematographic one—does not contradict the immediacy of the audience's perception. This immediacy is entirely lacking in the literary character, who lives in the reader's mental images.

On the other hand, theatre does not give you access to the characters' thoughts. The novel is a privileged gateway to the protagonists' interiority, while in theatre we only know what the character says or does. A staged character is developed as an absolute exteriority. This exteriority is not contradicted by particular dramaturgical strategies that have the function of suggesting, and making us privy to, the protagonists' inner thoughts—I am referring here to monologues exclusively addressed to the public and not heard by the other characters.

There is always a voice we can hear and a body we can see, nothing has to be imagined. The novel represents characters' inner life and conscience since, in its fundamental grammar, it is a long prose-story that aims to reveal the protagonists' psychology. By participating in the characters' deepest thoughts and emotions, the reader develops a feeling of intimacy and proximity with respect to them. On the contrary, in theatre we immediately have the body, not soul, of the character.

In conclusion, theatre displays different yet active imaginative function, or different reality effects and subjectivation processes (Rancière 2008). In this sense, it is impossible for us to leave a performance unchanged—and this is always the case, not only with those contemporary performances that call for the spectator's direct participation. We will have changed somehow even if we have simply been sitting in an armchair watching a show for a couple of hours, without actually "doing" anything. The so-called inactivity of the audience proves to be a form of collaboration in the work, it indicates an essential relational pole of the event, as already stressed by eighteenth-century French aesthetic theories on the relationship between actor and audience—primarily those developed by Diderot. The spectator's gaze is his particular dramatic action.

## 4. *How many spectators are there?*

Given these premises, we can now focus on the formal position of the reader / viewer by setting out from the following statement by Jouve: "the reader is always, more or less confusedly, shared among three attitudes of belief: he knows that he deals with an imaginary world; he pretends to believe this world; he actually believes this world at a level he is unaware of" (Jouve 1992: 82). These three distinctions correspond, in technical terms, to the following tripartition: *lectant, lisant,* and *lu*. According to Jouve, when we are reading a work of fiction, one of these positions is always privileged. Depending on the context, one can be a *lectant*, a *lisant* or a *lu.* Of course, there is no rigid distinction between these figures. There may be a shift in perspective during the reading, depending on whether the author, at a given moment, is seeking to achieve a didactic or realistic effect, to elicit empathy or to create a sense of alienation. These figures can also coexist at the same time: the emotional engagement can make the reader more intensely interested in technical aspects, for example.

The *lectant* embodies the intellectual curiosity of the critical approach which, in relation to the text, always bears the author's presence in mind. Schaeffer distinguishes the *lectant jouant* from the *lectant interprétant*. While the former is involved in the construction of the novel's narrative strategies, the latter is committed to deciphering the overall meaning of the work in a hermeneutic direction. The *lectant* perceives that the character is a pawn of the author, whose moves can be predicted on the basis of verisimilitude, but also of conformity to the

conventions governing the various narrative genres. The author orients the reading and imposes his own power through a strategy of persuasion. In theatre, the *lectant* finds an emblematic counterpart in the figure of the critic and expert. When he/she sees a stage play, he/she pays attention not to be carried away by emotional involvement, but instead remains constantly attentive to the overall vision of the work, to the acting techniques, the style of direction, dramaturgy, and the technical choices in terms of scenography, lighting, and music. This figure is a busy spectator who anticipates narrative developments (*jouant*) and interprets the hermeneutical meaning of the work (*interprétant*), from an exclusively critical and intellectual perspective.

The position of the *lisant* is completely different, for it embodies the kind of reader who is the victim of the novel's illusion. Of course, the *lisant* is not naive. He/she does not believe in fictitious truths as a matter of blind faith, but rather participates in a fragile, temporary and limited illusion. His/her reading is that of the child who has survived within the adult. At the core of the *lisant*, the emotional engagement prevails over the critical part, which has been anesthetized. This attitude is connected to the perception of the character as a different person with a life of his/her own. This type of reading tends to assign the character an autonomous existence. The author uses certain techniques of seduction, rather than persuasion, in relation to *lisant*, thus concocting a system of sympathy in the construction of the text. For instance, characters almost always have a proper name and a credible existence, and their actions are consistent and goal-oriented, even though they often turn out to be unpredictable. All this gives the impression of an actual otherness. Moreover, the characters' concreteness is heightened by the fact that the novel evokes their inner life, thoughts, emotions, and passions. The *lisant* intimately shares the characters' suffering, love, dreams, and childhood memories. The theatrical counterpart to the novel's *lisant* consists in the spectator who forgets all about the author and the director, the acting strategies and the stage techniques. He/she is carried away by the story and puts himself/herself on the level of the events. This spectator undergoes catharsis, that purification of the passions which produces an organic effect of relief. Although the spectator does not have access to the intimacy of the character's thoughts and emotions, given the above-mentioned regime of absolute theatrical exteriority, he/she feels a degree of compassion, whereby he/she senses that the character's fate concerns him/her deeply.

Finally, different still is the position of the *lu,* which refers to the satisfaction of the reader's unconscious instincts. In this sense, the character is the support that allows us to satisfy at an imaginary level the unconscious desires that are repressed by our social life. The *lu* is connected to the perception of the character as a ghost that the text awakens in the reader: an echo of the author's ghosts. The censorship of the superego is suspended, because we affirm that what we are

reading is just a work of art. The more the content refers to cultures that are distant from our own, the more the superego's control is overcome. The author orients the *lu*'s desire through a strategy of temptation, rather than persuasion or seduction. He/she tempts the reader to positively repeat, in an imaginary or playful way, already experienced traumas, allowing the *lu* to overcome them and rediscover his/her past or unknown self. In order to tempt the reader, the author can stir up three forms of *libido*: the desire for feeling (*sentiendi*), for domination (*dominandi*), and for knowledge (*sciendi*). This last *libido*—what we might call a voyeuristic drive—is the one prevalent in the grammar of theatre. Indeed, the audience has the possibility to discover bodies that are present and indifferent to external gazes. The innocence of the image allows us to witness otherwise forbidden scenes, whether they be erotic, criminal, or simply situations in which bodies in action seem not to care about the viewer. In this respect, Freud traces the voyeuristic drive back to the primal scene (*Urszene*), in which the child wishes to discover the sexual secrets of adults, and especially those of his/her parents (Freud 1918).

## 5. *Let's play Reality*

Finally, let us try to apply this theoretical framework to a specific case study: the performance *Reality* by Deflorian/Tagliarini (2012). The protagonist is Janina Turek, a Polish woman who has filled 748 notebooks with random notes on her life: 38,196 phone calls, 23,397 "good mornings", 1,922 appointments, and so on. Janina writes down the facts of her life in the form of data, she strives to get a grasp on reality by noting everything that happens to her, without adding any personal thoughts or feelings. This strange activity, which can even be compared to a daily mission, is defined as a sort of "recording" based on "attempts of description of reality". No doubt, there is some madness in this 'stalking of life', yet the spectator of the performance *Reality* is unlikely to conclude that Janina is suffering from obsession. There is a sense of beauty, or a form of amazement in the face of the endless elusive details of reality and the protagonist's effort to grasp them as much as possible. In a radical rejection of all hierarchy, it is impossible to accord more or less importance to any single event: the play offers a celebration of coincidences, chance, discovery, and surprise. Janina's attempt to represent reality reflects a survival instinct which pushes her to record the world in order to learn how to inhabit it. *Reality* represents the reality of a woman who has done nothing but represent reality. However, the performance does not ultimately amount to a form of meta-theatre, because it proposes a very stratified intertwining between the reality of theatre and the theatricality of reality. Deflorian and Tagliarini suggest that "[i]f one wants to pretend well, everything must be true", when they take turns at playing Janina and, from time to time, at telling her story.

The position of the spectator vis-à-vis *Reality* is paradoxical. The critical viewer or theatrical *lectant* is faced with a short-circuit. The *jouant* or the viewer who attempts to anticipate narrative developments cannot make any assumptions: since the performance opens with an attempt to represent Janina's death, we already know from the start how everything will end. The *interprétant* or spectator committed to interpreting the hermeneutic-intellectual meaning of the work will soon discover that form and content coincide. After all, the performance represents the reality of a woman who does nothing but represent reality. The emotional spectator or theatrical *lisant* lives Janina's story, growing fond of her and all her details, and placing her on the same level as the events and objects that surround her. Therefore, Janina's story once again becomes part of her representation of reality. Finally, the instinctual spectator, the equivalent of the *lu,* observes a stage that itself represents the observation of the world—the voyeuristic enjoyment of voyeurism, the innocence of the image in the mirror, *libido sciendi* in its highest degree. The relationship that this performance establishes with the spectator is deep and complex, especially since it revolves around a subjectivity that desperately seeks what is other than itself, yet without knowing how to find it: Janina's notebooks are all written in the third person and can be interpreted as a way by which this woman entrusts her own truth to otherness. Together with the notebooks, there are also some postcards that Janina has sent to herself and kept. These are the only traces of her voice in the first person. In one postcard, the woman wonders if she is living, or just pretending to live. Is this life real, in which all she does is represent reality? Janina does not answer the question, and neither can we. However, we can repeat the question—and no one can find a better place for repeating it than theatre.

## 6. *Conclusion: a fictional truth*

In conclusion, the present paper has sought to outline the nature of theatrical fiction. It invites us to think about the processes of subjectivation via a constant redefinition of the boundaries between real experience and the cultural imaginary. The fictional universe contributes to affective, intellectual, and instinctual enrichment.

In disclosing a cultural horizon, the theatrical aesthetic experience also has the education function of obliging the spectator to combine the different points of view and levels of meaning within the plot. It is as if there were an implicit agreement, an *a priori* pact, whereby the spectator lends himself/herself to playing his/her role and to believing in fictions, thus demonstrating his/her trust in the author/actors. In order for any work of fiction to work—not just a realistic work—it is necessary for the reader/spectator to believe in a preliminary source of authority and to accept what is written or staged as the truth, albeit a fictitious truth.

Unlike philosophical truth, fictional truth lacks a verifiable objective referent. Nonetheless, there is an objective concreteness to the experience that is made when one attends a performance. It is an intellectual and emotional game, in which, for example, a story is followed with anguish and satisfaction. At the origin of playful curiosity lies the promise of some instinctual pleasure and of a certain degree of intellectual freedom. And when we get lost in something other than ourselves, but which at the same time concerns us, this generates the pleasure of theatrical vision. A character may serve as an inspiring *exemplum*, or even as a figure with which we identify; but it can also be constituted only as an otherness that we freely meet and that, through its thoughts or conduct, mixes its own feelings with those of the reader or spectator. As Jouve puts it, "the affective connection between fictitious beings and the reader makes the latter like a stranger to himself" (Jouve 1992: 221). The encounter with the character is an opportunity to discover oneself through difference. This encounter does not consist in the acquisition of knowledge, but in a process of subjectivation, in which knowledge arises as if by refraction. To quote Jouve one last time, "the Self is inseparable from the Other […]. The *alter* acts as a bridge between the inner world of the subject and the outer world" (Jouve 1992: 221). This is why fiction turns out to be not a closed and separate world, but a fundamental resource for freely interacting with other, different spheres of reality.

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# *Thought Experiments as Social Practice and the Clash of Imaginers*

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*In the last few years, several philosophers have highlighted the social dimension of imagination. In this paper I argue that thought experiments prompt social uses of imaginings if we understand them as props in games of make-believe. In prescribing to imagine stories that develop through fictional narratives, authors of thought experiments prompt their readers to engage in the same imaginative project—at least in its salient aspects—and to endorse their conclusions. Contributions on this topic focus on cases where coordination across imaginers is immediately successful. However, this is not the end of the story. I draw attention to situations where this is not the case, as the practice of thought experimentation often proceeds through criticism, rejections, and amendments. I focus on cases where imaginers do not endorse the conclusion proposed by the author of a thought experiment and either (i) fully reject the principles of generation, (ii) draw different fictional truths from the same principles, or (iii) amend the principles. Although cases of imaginative disharmony are usually dismissed as failures, I acknowledge them as fruitful steps in the cognitive advancement achievable by thought experiments. Cooperative imaginers challenge the rules of the game in meaningful ways, which leads to enhancing fictional scenarios and framing them through different perspectives.*

**Keywords:** Thought experiments; imagination; Kendall Walton; metaphilosophy; epistemology of imagination.

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> If one takes it to be self-evident that people take pleasure in their own imaginations, then one should remember that such imagination is not like a picture or a three-dimensional model, but a complicated pattern of heterogeneous components: words and images. [Once one does so] one will then no longer oppose operating with written or acoustic signs to operating with "mental images" of events. (Wittgenstein 2018: 44)

## 1. *Introduction*

We usually think about imagination as a private, creative and unconstrained mental activity. And when we do so, we often have in mind examples of a similar kind, such as: the daydreamer who imagines herself drinking a refreshing cocktail on a Caribbean beach; the artist who mentally explores her next steps in creating an inspired artwork; the child dreaming a fantastic kingdom where the birds fly in the underground. All these imaginers are engaged in silent, lonesome imaginings. Nevertheless, if we consider other cases, we can focus on imaginative acts through different lenses. Take for instance the children playing cops and robbers in the garden, the actors performing in improvisational theatre, role-playing games and some kinds of shared meditation. These cases of joint activities seem to require participants to take part in the same imaginative projects in order to be successful. Thus, what strikes as salient in a heterogeneous family of activities such as imaginings (Kind 2013; Murphy 2020a) depends on which examples we take into consideration.

In recent literature, more attention has been paid to social aspects of imaginings in general (Walton 1990; Szanto 2017), in architectural practices (Murphy 2004, 2005), in scientific models (Salis 2020; Salis and Frigg 2020) and in thought experiments (Meynell 2014, 2018; Bancong and Song 2020; Salis and Frigg 2020) among others. In this paper I will follow this path and focus on the social dimension of thought experiments. Most of these accounts are based on Kendall Walton's groundbreaking *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990). Even though they all acknowledge the relevance of the social aspects of imagination in thought experiments, there are several issues that have not yet been properly addressed and wait for further clarification. In what follows, I will build my argument on the Walton's theory as well, but highlight an aspect that is neglected in the actual literature: taking thought experiments as a case study of social imaginings can shed light on the dimensions of clash and disharmony in imaginative projects, even in collaborative ones. As I understand it, social imagining does not presuppose harmony; we can—and we often do—imagine together with others even when there is disagreement between imaginers. This point will turn out to be an epistemic virtue, as divergencies in the conclusions of thought experiments can help in refining the fictional scenario and the issue at stake.

Thought experiments are quite compelling and seductive insofar as they unfold through rhetorical ornaments and fictional elements. Some of them are even so popular that they can be regarded as pop culture stuff, such as Schrödinger's Cat. However, the authors' ability to illustrate their point using this kind of device can lead to some suspicion. In the history of philosophy, we can find several concerns about the possible misuses of fiction and imagination in the understanding of reality; the power of *pictures* to "hold us captive" (Wittgenstein 2009: §115) is well known, after all. An appealing thought experiment may, therefore, prompt us to endorse a well-written, but flawed conclusion.

In this paper I suggest that this concern is somewhat overrated, as the social practice of thought experiments often encourages researchers to criticize and challenge an author's conclusion. Thought experiments are not only successful devices for illustrating or arguing for a thesis (among others uses); they are also *dialectical moves* that allow even those who do not share their conclusions to take a step forward and enrich the debate. The cognitive value of thought experiments also lies in their prompting of criticism, insofar as the clash they encourage is epistemically productive.

The paper develops two central arguments: that (i) thought experiments prompt social uses of imaginings if we understand them as props in games of make-believe and that (ii) cases of imaginative disharmony are at the heart of thought experiments as social practice and, thus, should be considered fruitful steps in cognitive advancement. The two arguments are intertwined by the topic of rule-following, which will stay in the background as an underground river flowing throughout the paper. The first argument will show that imagining together is (also) a matter of complying with the rules set by objects designed for this task by their authors. The second one, on the other hand, focuses on the capacity of the participants in the imaginative activity to break these rules, and will suggest that this *anarchic* activity can lead to an epistemic progress.

The paper is structured as follows: section 2 is dedicated to the Waltonian theory in order to highlight the social and normative aspects of our imaginative activities, along with the objects involved in them. In section 3 I will focus on thought experiments within this framework, understanding them as props with the social function of prescribing meaningful imaginings. Section 4 will be the core of my paper. Here I will consider the different ways in which a thought experiment can be criticized, emphasizing the epistemic value of the clash between researchers engaged in the same thought experiment.

## 2. *The social dimension in games of make-believe*

According to Walton (1990), games of make-believe are imaginative activities in which we explore fictional worlds. For example, some children who play together imagine that the floor in the living room is deadly

lava. Someone among them shouts "Watch out! The floor is lava!" and the fictional adventure quickly sets in: the children immediately jump on chairs and sofas to protect themselves.[1] From the beginning of the game, and until its conclusion, the children imagine that "the floor is lava" and behave accordingly.[2] To make-believe that a given proposition is true (that it is a *fictional truth*) implies some sort of imaginative constraints to it, in more or less rigorous ways depending on the kind of game being played. What is true in a fictional world is constrained by the rules that all players must accept in order to participate in the same imaginative activity. Walton calls these rules *principles of generation* (Walton 1990: 38). Thus, if the children accept the principle of generation "the floor is lava", they begin to share the same fictional world—that is, they all start a game in which it is prescribed to imagine that the floor in the living room is made of lava.[3] As long as they keep playing together, their actions and imaginings are constrained by the principle(s) of generation that they have mutually agreed upon. Accordingly, the action of a child walking on the floor can have several meanings within the game. For example, she either (i) imagines to be tired of living, (ii) proposes a new principle of generation and pretends to wear shoes with special soles, (iii) does not play correctly or (iv) is just bored and decides to quit the game.

We can thus highlight a salient feature in games of make-believe: they introduce "criteria of correctness" in imaginative activities. No player is allowed to imagine everything that just pops into her head during make-believe. There are rules that determine what is true in the game (i.e., *fictional truths*) and authorize certain kinds of imagining and not others.

Far from being exclusive to children's games of make-believe, the principles of generation are also central in all forms of representational art, like sculptures, paintings, movies and novels among others. All

[1] This is just one of many possible ways to start a game of make-believe. For example, a child might say nothing, but act as if she was in pain on contact with the floor, saying something like "gee, that was close!". Depending on the reaction of the other children, the game will either begin or be rejected. Thus, it is not necessary to explicitly formulate any proposition to start a game of make-believe.

[2] The children in this example do not only imagine propositions: they are imagining that "the floor is lava" as well as imagining objects (such as lava) and actions (such as saving their own lives). These three kinds of imagination (called "propositional", "objectual" and "experiential" imagination, respectively) can all be prompted in games of make-believe (Walton 1990: 42 f.).

[3] Unlike possible worlds *à la* Lewis (1986) in which every proposition has a truth value, fictional worlds are indeterminate in many aspects and may contain contradictions and other absurdities. Some fictional worlds even prompt our imaginings because of their indeterminacy. Many literary minimalist stories, such as those written by Raymond Carver, prompt meaningful imaginings precisely because they remain silent about the consequences of certain fictional actions. But what are fictional worlds? Walton seems to conceive them as collections or clusters of fictional truths, although this does not imply any ontological commitments.

these works of art prescribe different kinds of imagining (to their appreciators). For example, Maurits C. Escher's *Relativity* prescribes the viewer to imagine a tangled stairwell, while the incipit of Raymond Carver's short story *After the Denim* asks the reader to imagine that "Edith Packer had the tape cassette plugged into her ear, and she was smoking one of his cigarettes" (Carver 1989: 67).

According to the examples presented so far, we obtain and use principles of generation through a wide variety of objects and levels of sophistication; from improvised games to artistic masterpieces, we can recognize some kind of relationship between principles of generation and concrete objects. In the context of the first example, if children were in the backyard, the principle "the living room floor is lava" would sound wrong or unworkable. It seems to assign the concrete living room floor an essential role in the imaginative project. According to Walton, principles of generation generate props, that is, objects which, in turn, generate fictional truths; they determine what is true in the world of fiction. The principles of generation, thus, are prescriptions to imagine, which the participants of the game need to comply with. Props are objects that retrieve principles of generation and that can give coherence to a fictional world. For the children who participate in the game, the floor becomes a prop, just like Escher's lithography and the copy of Carver's book become a prop for the audience. Employing props in imaginative activities makes it possible to ground the games of make-believe on objects that can be intersubjectively perceived and enjoyed by all the participants in the game. Floor tiles, prints and texts may serve as external criterion in this.

Unlike floor tiles, an object specifically designed for being used as prop—such as a painting or a fictional narrative—is always associated with its own fictional world (or its own cluster of fictional truths) that participants of the game are invited to imagine. Even if someone, engaging in the game prompted by Escher's lithography, would imagine go-kart tracks instead of chaotic stairs, the world of *Relativity* would not change at all—that is, the imaginer's failure to conform her imagining to the prescriptions contained in the work does not change the fictional world generated by it.

In this context it may be helpful to consider the distinction that Walton makes between the "work world" and the "game world". The player builds her own world of fiction by importing and expanding that of the work. Leaving extreme examples aside (imagining go-kart tracks albeit the prop asks us to imagine stairs can be understood as a refusal to cooperate), even in most accurate cases it is possible to find some minimal discrepancies between the work world and the game world that, however, do not undermine the quality of the game and the players' coordination.[4] The cluster of fictional truths associated with a work

[4] For example, in a game world it could be true that the viewer observes a couple arm-in-arm walking on the stairs of Escher's *Relativity*, while the same proposition

world is an external and objective criterion by which imaginers can "calibrate" their imaginings. But not all fictional truths are explicit and straightforward during the contemplation of a fictional world. In this regard, game worlds can be useful as their "authors" (the players in the game of make-believe) can sometimes focus on some fictional truths rather than others, grasping something meaningful and offering it to other players—at least to cooperative imaginers.[5] Work worlds are, therefore, "out there" and ready to be explored.[6]

The salient point here is that the work world has a normative aspect that all players should take into account in order to properly play the same game. On the other hand, the game worlds are a plurality of worlds—one for each player—which may conflict with each other, and in which personal peculiarities can be put into play. The work world is, therefore, the world of conformity to rules, whereas game worlds are more anarchic. The work world sets the constraints and, depending on the purpose of the game of make-believe, participants can be encouraged to challenge these constraints in meaningful ways within their own game worlds.

Nonetheless, it can sometimes be difficult for all participants to take part in the same game. The meaning and the application of principles of generation may indeed differ, depending on the target community. It may be difficult for a New York broker and a North Sentinel inhabitant to play the same game but, after all, they would have more basic difficulties to communicate in the first place.[7] However, problems can also arise between players with similar cultural backgrounds. Here we can find more widespread and interesting cases of partial incomprehension, that is, when one successfully participates in the game but imagines different details or draws different implications. If a narrative prescribes to visually imagine two falling objects tied to one another without further instructions, then there are many aspects that remain blank and can be filled in by the reader by her own will or her

is not true in the work world. The viewer is not inside the lithograph observing people, so "the viewer observes a couple arm-in-arm" is not a fictional truth in the world of this artwork. This difference between a game world and the work world does not spoil the prop insofar as the viewer is able and willing to follow its prescriptions.

[5] In this context, a cooperative player is whoever intends to follow the work world in creating her own game world and is open to suggestions from other players who intend to follow the work world as well.

[6] This means that work worlds are independent from their authors. Even the author herself, playing the game of make-believe prompted by her creation, constitutes her own game world. In other words, who designs a prop is just another player with no specific privileges.

[7] I assume that if communication is at risk, then it is difficult to start joint activities based on imaginings. After all, the whole make-believe mechanism is based on the ability to prescribe imaginings. If the props are not apt to convey these prescriptions, and the player is equally unable to retrieve and understand them, then it would be difficult to start any collaborative imaginative project.

idiosyncratic preferences. I can imagine spiky blue rocks, tied by a jute rope, while another player can imagine gray smooth spheres, tied by a cotton rope. We would both correctly follow the same prescriptions. To what extent one can freely imagine the details is determined by the aptness of a prop's prescriptions.

Games in which we have to imagine down to the smallest detail require equally accurate prescriptions—and, thus, excellent authors. If a narrative prescribes us to imagine two falling bodies in order to argue against Aristotelian physics, then it will not add to the aesthetic details of the bodies but highlight other qualities, such as their different sizes and their being composed of the same material. In this case, as long as there is consensus on which principles of generation apply, differences in game worlds based on personal idiosyncrasies do not undermine the participants' imaginative harmony. In other words, the participants in the same game of make-believe will imagine the same sequence of events, at least in the aspects the narrative makes salient. If, on the other hand, the prop is designed to solicit a relatively detailed visual mental image, then complex descriptions or other media (such as paintings) will be employed to prescribe the most suitable imaginings.

Even when participants' game worlds diverge on relevant details, however, such dissonance may not be a problem. Some props (such as photographs) may be apt to prescribe *de se* imaginings (imaginings about oneself) with the aim of prompting one's memories, and this would trigger different streams of imaginings in each player. A certain amount of ambiguity might be desirable, as well as deliberately pursued by the author of the prop, as it might be significant in some respects. Indeterminacy and sketchy scenarios can encourage the creation of insightful game worlds. Their authors can then communicate the peculiarities of their game worlds to other players, suggesting implications or highlighting aesthetic details that others could have overlooked (Meynell 2018: 504). The lack of harmony between imaginers may be a matter of time. Moreover, it could be useful to discuss which rules to accept or which consequences to draw from them. In this case, ambiguity would be an effective rhetorical device in prompting the creation of new principles of generation, the quality and relevance of which would rely in the players' imaginative capacities. In section 4 of this paper I will return on the disharmony between imaginers, focusing on its potential epistemic value.

Let me draw some conclusions from what has been written until now. Walton's theory fruitfully highlights a marked normative and social dimension of our imaginings. It does so by focusing on concrete objects involved in imaginative projects and showing that props can coordinate our imaginings, giving participants a sense of the rules and constraints at play in the imaginative activity. Emphasizing the normative and social level of imagination allows Walton to draw an analogy between shared imaginings and games, shifting the attention from

our personal and lonesome imaginings to activities guided by intersubjectively valid criteria. Whoever does not follow the rules is free to do so but is out of the game.

So far, we have appreciated the social aspect of imagination. However, the activity of imagining together can be investigated in different ways. An alternative to Walton's theory is Keith Murphy's notion of "collaborative imaginings" (Murphy 2005). The anthropologist, like Walton, acknowledges a crucial role to concrete objects during shared imaginings. He invites us to consider the example of a group of architects who design a service yard section of a laboratory building. With this example, he highlights the central role of concrete objects in shared imaginings insofar as participants work on the same project employing drawings, gestures and verbal suggestions. According to Murphy, the building draft map placed on the work table "serves as the actual anchor of the talk" (Murphy 2005: 124). Moreover, the architect who places his hand on the map, exactly where he would like to locate a door, is using a gesture in order to help other participants to collectively imagine how the building would be modified according to his suggestion.

However, a make-believe-oriented account is more inclusive than the one provided by Murphy, as the latter considers perceptual-like imaginings only. According to Murphy, collaborative imagining is a special kind of perception—or something like a bridge between visual perception and imagination—which he calls "*perceiving in the hypothetical mode*, that is, purposefully seeing things as if they were something else" (Murphy 2005: 117). This characterization of imagining can easily account for the specific architectural activities under consideration, but it does not account as well for other kinds of shared imaginings such as those based on fictional narratives. They can call for different kinds of imagination depending on which prescriptions are at play. A detailed description of a castle on the clouds, for instance, could prompt perception-like imaginings resembling René Magritte's *Castle in the Pyrenees* while an intimate story narrated from an engaged point of view could trigger forms of experiential imaginings.

Moreover, Murphy's account succeeds in explaining a synchronous kind of imaginative activities in which participants perform collective imaginings at the same time. The simultaneity of participation in these architectural activities encourage the dialogue and, therefore, prompts a coordinated and engaged discussion based on shared imaginings in synchrony. However, we can imagine together also in asynchrony, such as when we discuss the same thought experiment, criticizing it or designing some of its variants, at different times. Walton's theory has the merit of successfully explaining these cases as well, as props keep their capacity to prescribe imaginings to different audiences at different times. Asynchronous imagining together can easily explain how the debate on a thought experiment (or other fictional narratives) actually

works, that is, through dialectical moves that occur in different temporal stages.[8]

The distinction between synchronous and asynchronous kinds of imagining together can correspond to the two meanings of "together" which Thomas Szanto distinguishes in "imagining together". It is one thing when some researchers non-simultaneously imagine something, another when they imagine the same state of affairs at the same time. The former is called "imagining something *alongside* with others" while the latter is a form of "*collectively* imagining something *together*" (Szanto 2017: 232). Szanto, as well as Murphy, focuses on the second case—undoubtedly more interesting on a phenomenological level of analysis—and claims that the first one is just an "ordinary case" of social imaginings. However, my line of reasoning proceeds on a different level. I do not focus on imagination as a mental act, neither private nor collective, but on its uses within philosophical and scientific research communities; and one of the most widely used imagination-based devices employed in these contexts are thought experiments. It is for this very reason that I will delve into the topic of thought experiments in the next section.

## 3. *Thought experiments as social practice*

What thought experiments are is a matter of debate. Very briefly, they can be understood as arguments "disguised in a vivid pictorial or narrative form" (Norton 2004: 45), as "telescopes into the abstract realm" of Platonic entities (Brown 2004: 1131), as mental models that reconfigure past experiences through simulation and memory (Gendler 2010; Miščević 1992, 2007; Nersessian 1992, 2018), or as a special kind of fictional narratives (Carroll 2002; Meynell 2014, 2018; Salis and Frigg 2020; Willée 2019) among others. In this paper I will focus on the fictionalist account, since understanding thought experiments as fictional narratives highlights the essential role that imagination plays in them.[9] Walton's theory, unlike other ones, allows me to acknowledge

[8] An interesting feature of the asynchronous kind of imagining together is that it enables an imaginative project to proceed even after its author's death.

[9] Most fictionalist accounts compare thought experiments and literary works of fiction. This analogy is at the heart of an entire research program, and it has been fruitfully discussed by several philosophers. For instance, Catherine Elgin focuses on the mechanisms of exemplification at work in both kinds of artifact (2014). David Egan, on the other hand, argues for a skeptical outcome, insofar as—unlike literary works—thought experiments are always used to make arguments (2016). Moreover, Iris Vidmar highlights the cognitive value of hypotheses that can be found in both thought experiments and literary fiction (2013) and, more recently, Alice Murphy concentrates on the aesthetic details used in thought experiments and the flexibility of its interpretations (2020b). Finally, David Davies (2007) provides a conceptual geography in which the main accounts of thought experiments are linked to some central questions in the philosophy of literature. See his (Davies 2018) for an excellent overview of the debate. I choose not to elaborate on this analogy in my

the social dimension of thought experiments, and to explain how researchers engaged in thought experiments can take the same fictional event into consideration: they participate in the same game of make-believe—or, in other words, they comply with the same prescriptions to imagine.[10] The section of John Searle's paper in which the *Chinese Room* thought experiment is presented (1980: 417 f.), for example, is a prop that generates, among others, the fictional truth that the person locked inside the room can answer questions formulated in Chinese even though she does not speak Chinese.[11] Similarly, in Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons* there is a prop that invites the reader to imagine a science fiction scenario in which teletransportation is real (Parfit 1984: 199 f.).[12]

Both props are specifically designed to claim that computers operate syntactically with no semantic understanding and that personal

paper, as I have explored elsewhere the similarities and differences between thought experiments and other fictional works (see Molinari 2020).

[10] One might argue that thought experiments could also be conducted by its authors in isolation. However, props will be used in these cases as well: just as a painting could be drawn and kept secret by its painter, an author of a thought experiment could write a fictional narrative and keep it for herself. Actually, in both cases a fictional world will be created. The main difference between these lonesome cases and the social ones is that, in the former, the solitary participant needs only her consent to start, modify, or end a game of make-believe, while in the latter the consent of all players is required. I chose to delve into the social uses of thought experiments because, I argue, this is their primary—as well as their most fruitful—use in philosophical and scientific research communities.

[11] Very briefly, Searle asks us to imagine that there is a machine capable of properly answering all questions in Chinese and to pass the *Turing test*. According to strong A.I. theorists, this computer would understand Chinese because of the similarity between its behavior and that of a native Chinese speaker. Now imagine yourself locked inside this machine. In front of you there is a book containing the English version of the program used by the computer, along with plenty of paper and pens. Your task is to receive and send back Chinese ideograms from two openings connected to the outside world. You cannot understand these ideograms. However, thanks to the instructions in the book, you can create new Chinese ideograms as output. In this fictional scenario you're able to create answers that a Chinese speaker would find satisfactory, although you don't understand any of them. All you do is to follow instructions in the book. According to Searle, this lack of understanding suggests that a computer, being in the same situation as you, does not understand anything either.

[12] Parfit's famous *Teletransporter*'s thought experiment invites us to imagine a futuristic scenario in which teletransportation has been invented. This technology copies all the cells in a person's body, immediately sending them to another planet. An exact copy of the body is created at the arrival station. During this operation, the original one is destroyed. Parfit elaborates this fictional scenario wondering what it can show us about the concept of personal identity. There seems to be no problems at this stage of the story: if you enter the teletransporter, you're still yourself but on Mars. However, Parfit modifies the unfolding of events, making it difficult to know which person to identify with. Imagine that, due to a technical problem, your original body is not destroyed but is going to die. While your replica has arrived at its destination, your original self is dying. It is a fictional truth either that you will survive in your replica or that you will exist as two people for a few moments.

identity is not an "all or nothing" matter, respectively.[13] Thought experiments that occur in philosophical or scientific papers are, thus, *fictional narratives* that prescribe meaningful imaginings for epistemic purposes (to claim for, evaluate, show or reject a thesis). In order to be able to perform this function, the reader needs to accept the principles of generation at work, explore what would happen in the fictional scenario and ponders whether what is true in the fiction can also be significant for worldly-cognitive purposes. If the reader is able to figure out which consequences and implications are obtained by the principles of generation, it is possible that she will take into consideration a proposition she had never thought of, or to observe a phenomenon from a new perspective. If this consideration is correct, it shows that the most interesting thought experiments may be understood as some sort of epistemic calls to action—or, in our case, *calls to imagining*.

It is worth noting that Walton's theory and the mental model account are compatible, though. Among the many types of imaginings that a thought experiment can prompt, there may also be mental modeling—in which spatial or kinetic elements strike as salient. For instance, Hume's *Missing shade of blue* (Hume 1999: 9 f.) triggers a perceptual kind of imagination, while wondering to imagine whether the sofa can get through the door would prompt the creation of a mental model. Moreover, Nersessian (2018: 313) herself draws attention to the narrative presentation of thought experiments, although she focuses on mental representations it triggers rather than its social and normative dimension.

## 4. *The cooperative clash of imaginers*

I have highlighted two main points so far. The first is that people can imagine together by using props; the second is that thought experiments, understood as a special kind of props, invite readers to collaborate in epistemic, imaginative projects. Contributions on this topic typically focus on cases where coordination across imaginers is successful at once, that is, when readers accept all the principles of generation designed by the author, play along with the narrative, and endorse the conclusion. However, this is not the end of the story, as the practice of thought experiments often proceeds through criticism, rejections and amendments. Endorsing the author's conclusion is only one of the possible outcomes: once published, thought experiments (as well as other

[13] It might seem that there is a gap to be bridged between "concrete props", such as the aforementioned floor, Escher's lithograph and Carver's book on the one hand, and thought experiments on the other. After all, unlike thought experiments, lithographs and books can be hung on a wall or placed on a table. However, understanding thought experiments as fictional narratives can help to bridge the gap. Just like other fictional narratives, thought experiments are props composed of texts, utterances, or objects made up of both texts and images. See (Meynell 2018) for an insightful discussion on thought experiments and the pictures that often accompany them.

props) begin to be conducted and discussed within the community of researchers. These dynamics prompt participants not only to follow prescriptions to imagine, but even to both acknowledge and evaluate the rules and constraints at play in each thought experiment. It is precisely at this point that the social dimension of thought experiments comes into focus and shows an epistemic value—by discussing, modifying or rejecting the imagined scenarios, along with the rules that design them.

The point can be highlighted by analyzing the common practice of criticizing a thought experiment. By framing it within a Walton-inspired theory, criticisms can be done in at least three ways:

(i) *Presenting new principles of generation*. A critic might reject all the principles of generation and fictional truths made explicit by the author. That is, the player thinks the game is just wrong or misleading. This can happen for different reasons. For instance, the opponent may find that, after accepting these principles and these fictional truths, the proposed scenario is overly implausible, clueless or not apt. In these cases, researchers usually proceed by presenting a new thought experiment that is claimed to be better suited for the epistemic purposes of the discussion. For instance, Searle quotes an objection to his *Chinese room* in which the reader is asked to imagine a new fictional world by presenting a new prop: she is no longer asked to imagine a person locked up in an isolated room but "a program […] that simulates the actual sequence of neuron firing at the synapses of the brain of a native Chinese speaker when he understands stories in Chinese and gives answer to them" (Searle 1980: 420). The opponent believes, perhaps on the back of previous theoretical commitments concerning strong A.I., that this new fictional scenario is better suited to shed light on the problem, insofar as "at the level of the synapses, what would or could be different about the program of the computer and the program of the Chinese brain?" (Searle 1980: 420). Searle replies to this objection by accepting the new game but framing it in his own theoretical framework and criticizing its conclusion.

(ii) *Reorganizing fictional truths*. A critic might accept the fictional world but perform a kind of "semantic reorganization" of the elements that were already present in order to highlight other fictional truths. Thought experiments are fictional narratives, and each narrative unfolds through choices: the author chooses what to focus on and what to neglect and, in doing so, she marks certain aspects as salient while hiding others. Thus, a clash between imaginers may arise about which elements are significant and how they should interact in the imaginative project. For example, Searle discusses a second objection in which a different conclusion to his *Chinese room* story is proposed: "while it is true that the individual person who is locked in the room does not understand the story, the fact is that

he is merely part of a whole system, and the system does understand the story" (Searle 1980: 419). Here it is argued that, by accepting all the principles of generation designed by Searle, the prop prescribes the reader to imagine a new fictional truth, namely that all the objects in the room operate as a system. Therefore, Searle's point needs to be revised. In particular, the philosopher is accused of having made the mistake of focusing his narrative too much on the single person locked up and not on the relations between the person and the other objects. This technique bears resemblances to what Roy Sorensen calls "smartfounding" (Sorensen 2019): the critic does not play along, but resists the thought experiment by showing that, even if one's imagining does conform to the prescriptions made by the author, one could obtain unexpected fictional truths that cause the imaginative project to fail. For example, the smartfounder engaging in Einstein's *Chasing the light* thought experiment would not grasp any Einstein's insight; she would only imagine an instant death caused by travelling at the speed of light (Norton 2013: 123).[14] Actually, smartfounding is not like performing a "semantic reorganization" in search of other significant fictional truths—it is just a way of refusing to cooperate. "Many hypotheticals have minor flaws that cooperative hearers ignore" (Sorensen 2019: 792). Thought experiments' narratives have such flaws as well, and cooperative imaginers know, following context-specific and epistemic constraints, which new fictional truths turn out to be meaningful and which ones only muddy the waters in the debate.

(iii) *Amending principles of generation*. A critic might both accept some principles of generation and amend others, in the conviction that a similar but not identical fictional world is more insightful for a given epistemic purpose. The technique consists of modifying certain details in order to significantly diverge the unfolding of fictional events and in consequence alter the conclusions. For instance, a detractor of Thomson's *Dying violinist* (1971: 48 f.) may modify the prop, asking to imagine a sick beloved one instead of a stranger violinist.[15] This detail would introduce an affective bond—absent in the original fictional narrative—that could change the result of the

[14] This tragic and brutal epilogue that results from a particular reading of Einstein's thought experiment is discussed by Michael Stuart in (2020: 974).

[15] In this famous thought experiment the philosopher asks you to imagine yourself waking up in bed next to a famous violinist who, as you learn right after your awakening, suffers from a kidney disease and risks dying. *The Society of Music Lovers* has kidnapped you because you have the same rare blood-type as the violinist and could, with your circulatory system pumping blood also through the violinist's body, save the life of the violinist. The hospital director concisely states: to save their life, you have to stay connected to their body for nine months. At this point, Judith Thomson asks the reader: "is it morally incumbent on you to accede to this situation?" (Thomson 1971: 49). This thought experiment invites the reader to imagine a fictional world designed to conceive, by analogy, the possible relationship

> thought experiment. We can find another example for this strategy in the replies to Searle's *Chinese room*, in which the isolated room is modified into a robot that, while it keeps receiving and delivering Chinese symbols, behaves indistinguishable from a system that actually perceives the nearby environment. It is worth noting that Searle responds to the objection by amending the fictional world a second time and reintroducing the human being, no longer locked in a room but within the giant robot.

All three techniques—presentation of new principles of generation, reorganization of fictional truths and amendment of some principles of generation—are guided by one's theoretical assumptions or epistemic *desiderata* on the topic at stake, and even by elaborate perspectives or worldviews. They all are strategies to change the spin of a thought experiment or to show its conclusion is false. Moreover, critics do try to build on it to bring home their own message—which shows that they recognize the epistemic value of the thought experiment they aim to criticize.

As it might be clear from the examples above, the whole section dedicated to the replies in Searle's paper is an interesting case study on the social dimension of imaginings. It suggests that a lively discussion has been carried out, in which different fictional worlds were to be imagined (we are asked to imagine systems composed by human beings, books, sheets of paper and pencils; robots equipped with cameras, arms and legs; sci-fi technologies that stimulate neuronal activity among others); in which the participants were required to play along with fictional worlds proposed by the others and in which all the three techniques of critique were applied. Moreover, as a debate concerning strong artificial intelligence, it unfolds across multiple disciplines. It shows, therefore, that sharing imaginings for epistemic purposes is not an exclusive philosophical matter but can occur in scientific contexts as well.

Actually, it should be noted that the point generalizes to most thought experiments that have been discussed within its research community. Putnam's *Twin Earth* thought experiment, for instance, prompts an insightful debate based on the same imaginative project as well. However, the debate it prompts has to be traced between different publications. Searle's paper, on the other hand, is a more accessible example—it is the author himself who quotes and evaluates the criticism directed at his thought experiment.

Nonetheless, all these rejecting and modifying fictional worlds seem to reveal a significant point: thought experiments prompt clashes, as well as harmony, between imaginers. Luckily enough, we can imagine together despite (or rather, thanks to) the underlying disharmony. To highlight this point is precisely the contribution I want to make with this paper.

between a mother and her fetus, and to understand some moral implications of abortion that could easily be underestimated or neglected.

I suggest that these cases of imaginative disharmony, usually dismissed as failures, are at the core of thought experiments as epistemic practice. As we have seen, imaginings in thought experiments (or, more generally, imaginings with others) are also a matter of rule following. That is, the readers engage in the same thought experiment as long as they follow the prop's prescriptions. However, this is just the beginning of the process: researchers who are willing to collaborate on the same imaginative project often do not immediately endorse the conclusion presented by the author of the thought experiment. On the contrary, they test it, evaluate other fictional worlds, break the rules and suggest new ones. In other words, they keep changing the prescriptions to imagine, giving their peculiar game worlds a prominent role. This activity is epistemically fruitful insofar as it prompts the exploration of novel fictional scenarios, the unveiling of some narrative implications neglected by the author, or the acknowledgement of which elements of the story are essential to reach a certain conclusion. As we have seen through the distinction between work world and game worlds, all the participants in the game may come to imagine new meaningful implications—or other significant but overlooked details—by developing their own game world. These dynamics call for the refinement of fictional narratives, the evaluation of alternative analogies and perspectives concerning the issue at stake. If a thought experiment is compelling, then it prompts both its critics to challenge it and its supporters to refine it.

This shows that thought experiments are part of the usual dialectical processes we know from philosophy and the sciences: also arguments do not convince right away (even if they are valid), but trigger forms of response that further elaborate or show wrong a given point: they are but one move in a more complex game. Thought experiments are just *dialectical moves* played in a somewhat different game than that of arguments. Being a different game, it calls for different rules. We already comply with some well-known rules for the advancement of debates through arguments: for instance, if the inferences are valid and the premises are true, then the conclusions will be true as well. Critics of arguments, therefore, will focus on uncovering invalid inferences or false premises.

Critics of thought experiments, on the other hand, do not seem to have such clearly delineated rules to comply with. Yet, thought experiments can be found in almost the entire history of philosophy and are still successfully employed nowadays. Moreover, if I am right, their success is enhanced insofar as they encourage their critics to participate in the same imaginative project and to propose the most various prescriptions to imagine.

The three techniques of criticizing a thought experiment that I have listed above are only little moves in a more complex project, which consists in the theorization of a *deontology* of thought experiments. The

purpose of this normative theory would be to make the rules explicit for successfully constraining our imaginings to conduct the dialectical game of thought experiments, along with its meaningful exceptions.

However, the project of a deontology composed of rules engraved in stone that are valid for all thought experiments could easily turn out to be a philosophical chimera. In a recent paper (2020) Michael Stuart argues that the epistemic power of imagination in the sciences is also to be found in its being *productively anarchic* and that researchers may achieve cognitive advancements precisely by breaking the rules that they (or others) have set for themselves. Nonetheless, identifying a set of malleable and context-dependent rules—even though they do not provide us with a theory that fits all cases—could help us to understand the success of the most famous thought experiments and, perhaps, even some of those yet to come.

The clash dimension intrinsic to the practice of thought experiments should not be understood in terms of resistance to them. Sorensen's excellent discussion on this latter topic in his (2019) highlights different ways of non-cooperation in the very practice of thought experiments, from unschooled response to imaginative resistance and sophisticated smartfounding. In these cases, those who engage in the thought experiment actually refuse the invitation to participate in the game of make-believe—expressing their intention not to cooperate. The causes of non-cooperation can be various. From the inability to recognize any epistemic value in imagination, to a general distrust in it; from the imaginative resistance that can be prompted by having to imagine alienating or unpleasant states of affairs, to the simple desire to make the opponent look like a fool.

My paper, however, focuses on the disharmony of imaginings between cooperating imaginers. That is, between those who have accepted—and not resisted—thought experiments. In order for this epistemic practice to flourish, cooperative researchers design exceptions to the rules of the game, breaking them in the most constructive, meaningful, and even anarchic ways. My point could be seen in continuity with Stuart's aforementioned idea of imagination as—at least in part—productively anarchic, although reframed in the context of social imaginings and collaborative imaginers. If we recognize the epistemic value of the productive anarchy of imagination, then we must take seriously into account the imaginative efforts with which cooperative imaginers challenge the rules of the game, along with their insightful game worlds—in order to evaluate their novel proposals within the research community.

## 5. *Conclusion*

In this paper I explored the mechanisms of cooperative clash between participants in the same thought experiment, focusing on their potential epistemic value. To achieve this, I started by pointing out some

important features of the Waltonian theory. Here we came across some technical terms such as "principle of generation", "prop" and "work world/game world" in order to emphasize the fact that, respectively, (i) we comply with rules to conduct social imaginative games, that (ii) we employ objects to understand which rules are at work, and that (iii) there may be a certain productive tension between the rules set by the objects and the imaginative freedom of the participants.

Framing thought experiments through this theory served two main purposes. Firstly, to emphasize the essential role that imagination plays in these epistemic devices. The second one is to understand thought experiments as dialectic moves in a game of imagination in which not only the author, but also other contributors participate—a game that develops through challenges, criticism and manipulation of fictional narratives.

The three techniques of critique that I have outlined are nothing more than an attempt to explicit some general ways in which a thought experiment can be challenged by a cooperative imaginer. They succeed in showing the importance of what I have briefly mentioned as a *deontology* of thought experiments, that is, they call for further investigation into which ways of regulating our imaginings are appropriate—and in which ways it is appropriate to break the rules instead—when it comes to employ them in our epistemic endeavors.

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# *Undecidable Literary Interpretations and Aesthetic Literary Value*

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*Literature has been philosophically understood as a practice in the last thirty years, which involves "modes of utterance" and stances, not intrinsic textual properties. Thus, the place for semantics in philosophical inquiry has clearly diminished. Literary aesthetic appreciation has shifted its focus from aesthetic realism, based on the study of textual features, to ways of reading. Peter Lamarque's concept of narrative opacity is a clear example of this shift. According to the philosophy of literature, literature, like any other art form, does not compel us to engage realistically with it. Against this trend, this paper argues for the distinction between two kinds of opacity, defending textual opacity as a necessary condition for literary opacity. In this sense, examples in literary criticism properly illustrate not a peripheral role of meaning in literary appreciation, but arbitrariness in interpretation, which involves semantic concerns. So the assumed interest in the specific ways in which literature embeds meaning in fictional narrative works.*

**Keywords:** Literature; polysemy; opacity; aesthetic justifications.

## 1. *Preliminary remarks*

In an insightful paper, Peter Lamarque argued that "the interests of the literary critic diverge from those of the logician" (Lamarque 1990a: 341) because what "a logician has to say about fiction *per se* is often remote from what a literary critic has to say about particular works of fiction" (Lamarque 1990a: 333). His sound arguments grasp our intuitions concerning the differences between literary criticism and logic.[1]

[1] In fact, the current Lamarquean theses on narrative opacity and thought theory strengthen his earlier arguments even more (Lamarque 2015: 51).

The logician's tools cannot properly grasp literary aspects such as connotation, thematic content, and narrative perspective. Thus, current Lamarquean approaches to literature provide interesting solutions to satisfy these conceptual requirements outside the logician domain (Lamarque 2014, 2015, 2017a; Lamarque and Olsen 1994).

Philosophy, however, has argued that the same theoretical framework accounts for very diverse artworld practices, failing to explain specific artistic practices. More particularly, intuitively diverse artistic objects such as Marcel Duchamp's *The Great Glass* or Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* and Kafka's modernist literature are covered by the same institutional principles, missing in the process some of their peculiarities.

Literature is frequently understood in terms of relational, not monadic predicates. So, the literary "per se" is more of a *stance* than a textual property:

> [T]he fictive dimension of stories (or narratives) is explicable only in terms of a rule-governed practice, central to which are a certain mode of utterance (fictive utterance) and a certain complex of attitudes (the fictive stance) […] The central focus is not on the structural or semantic properties of sentences but on the conditions under which they are uttered, the attitudes they invoke, and the role they play in social interactions. (Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 32)[2]

Opacity is a response to what the propositional literary attitude is. So understood, from narrative opacity and what Peter Lamarque calls "thought theory" (Lamarque 1981), the rational justification of aesthetic judgments of literature rests on fictive stances, not textual properties. Our discussion is precisely on the aesthetic justification of literary appreciation. It's impossible to perceptively distinguish between artworks and real things, likewise, according to the philosophy of literature, no text intrinsically contains any literary feature. So, if what we call *literary cognitivism* does not exclude the semantic dimension of literature, literary appreciation, from a philosophical point of view, maybe has nothing to do with meaning, hence, nothing to do with cognitivism. However, by discussing the institutional nature of opacity, it will also be possible to discuss the aesthetic nature of literary appreciation.

First, I argue that "narrative opacity" is the wrong expression for what should be called "literary opacity." Second, literary opacity, as a literary stance, is also determined by narrative opacity, textually defined. Thus, unlike the aesthetic justification of visual objects, which can be set out in both realist and anti-realist terms, the aesthetic justification of literature requires a clear realist dimension based on textual (semantic) properties.[3] To take a step toward the first point it is fruitful

[2] We can find another interesting conception of *fictive stance* in (Wolterstorff 1981: 233).

[3] The general implicit philosophical framework of this paper is that of María José Alcaraz León (2008).

to compare a traditional semantic approach to literature, namely, Galvano Della Volpe's theory of poetic speech to Peter Lamarque's theory of opacity as a propositional attitude. To develop the second point, I distinguish between textual and narrative opacity, illustrating this distinction with brief remarks on Franz Kafka's literature.

## 2. *Polysemy and paraphrasing*

Galvano Della Volpe's main concern is to discuss an old widespread aesthetic thesis: the irrationality of art and the apparent exclusive rationality of science. He refers to "traditional aesthetic mysticism" for which literary comprehension is nothing more than "'pure intuition' or 'pure image', [which] possesses a 'cosmic' or universal quality of a mystical and enigmatic kind" (Della Volpe 1978: 99). That mysticism, according to him, assumes a strong distinction between thought and language, which would make sense of a purely private aesthetic mental state. Thus, his efforts are addressed to question this distinction and identify both convergences and divergences between science and art. Through the dominant linguistic framework of his time, Della Volpe offered a clear answer to the first point: aesthetic mysticism forgets that the *parole* (*speech*) necessarily implies a *langue* (*language*), and conversely, the *parole* can produce changes in the *langue* (Della Volpe 1978: 101). Indeed, inside his framework, this logical step seems important because, assuming language as a "supraestructural" character, he precludes any possibility to argue for a completely private speech. Thus, if every speech act implies the whole social structure of language, every attempt to reduce its individual uses into private ones seems to be inhibited. At the same time, any modification of language originally detected in speech allows Della Volpe to argue for a dynamic relationship between general social conventions and their individual uses.[4] More interesting, however, is his conclusion on the divergences and convergences between science and literature. Pursuing a refutation of mysticism, Della Volpe shows a common feature of science and literature: the semantic control of language in the face of equivocal ordinary speech. Let us consider his answer to this point.

His conclusions rest on a few interesting examples. From these examples, Della Volpe attributes what he calls "semantic autonomy" (Della Volpe 1978: 116) to literature, while science implies "interchangeability and heteronomy" (Della Volpe 1978: 117). The first and second examples are from Petrarch and Góngora. The strategy employed in the first is, I think, the most interesting of the two. It compares the first and second versions of a poem to infer the relevance of connotation to poetry. This is the example from Petrarch's *canzone*:

[4] Della Volpe´s theoretical assumptions remain in Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between *speech* and *language* (Vulpe 2000: 292).

*In un boschetto novo, a l'un de' canti,*
*Vidi un giovane lauro verde e schietto,*
*E fra i bei rami udiasi dolci canti*
*(In a new wood, at one corner,*
*I saw a young laurel green and pure,*
*And amid its faire branches were heard sweet songs)*
(Quoted in Della Volpe 1978: 111)

The second version, however, is as follows:

*In un boschetto novo i rami santi*
*Florian d'un lauro giovenetto e schietto,*
*Ch'un delli arbor parea di paradiso;*
*E di sua ombra uscian sí dolci canti*
*(In a new wood were blossoming*
*The holy branches of a laurel young and pure,*
*Which seemed one of the trees of paradise;*
*And from its shade there issued such sweet songs)*
(Quoted in Della Volpe 1978: 112)

As we see, Petrarch decided to change his first attempt. The first element, which vaguely establishes a location, remains unchanged. However, in that same verse, "at once corner" is replaced with "were blossoming" as a predicate of "The holy branches of a laurel young and pure." Thus, the original introduction of a first person's point of view is erased in favor of a more objective perspective whose focus is on an event involving, not the laurel as a whole, but its *holy branches*. Furthermore, the second verse gets rid of "green," only remaining the adjectives "young" and "pure." That perhaps is related to a redundant image, juxtaposing *laurels* and *green*. As a complete novelty, Petrarch also introduces one more verse in the strophe: "Which seemed one the trees of paradise." This is the relative clause chosen by Petrarch to give a completely different *connotation* to the strophe. Also, the closing passages in each version are completely different: while, in the first attempt, the mention of the laurel's branches in the final verse appears associated with music perception, in the final version, there is no focus on perception but sweet music itself emerging from the laurel's shade. Thus, the general subjective tone was erased in the last version in favor of a more objective one. The last version also introduces a comparative image, which adds another sense completely absent from the first version. Moreover, the laurel is only a reference point in the final version because the focus is on its branches. With all these changes, tone, perspective, and focal elements have entirely changed from one version to another. Thus, from a denotative point of view, maybe these changes are not as relevant as the connotative ones. In fact, because of some identical references in these versions, it is possible to infer the general identity of both strophes. However, those subtle modifications (substitutions, perspective changes, new elements, etc.) transform the poem's identity *as a poem*. By pointing out the role of connotation to

convey poetic meaning, Della Volpe distinguishes poetic discourse from any other.

The second example from Góngora is the following:

> *cada sol repetido es un cometa*
> *(every sun repeated is a comet)*
> (Quoted in Della Volpe 1978: 141)

The very idea of a comet in that passage could be completely blurred if it were substituted for "flash lightning" because "the poetic effect immediately dissolves" (Della Volpe 1978: 142). The metaphor in the verse involves familiar domains. Although the image of a flash of lightning stimulates images of speed and light as well, it also brings to mind other concepts such as discharge, speed and violence, and, of course, lightning as an atmospheric phenomenon, not an astronomic one. These domain concepts focus on other connotations, so the initial ones are put aside. Again, paraphrasing is a key procedure to test the subtle nature of poetic communication or, in other words, to argue for the high relevance of connotation to the detriment of denotation in poetry. Thus, according to Della Volpe, every poetic transformation entails decisions on specific connotations. Because of the important role of *polysemy* in poetic communication, poetry, like science, subtly tries to control the meanings conveyed through language.[5] Science, however, does not apply its control in the form of coordinated connotations but univocal use of terms. Poetry is highly sensitive to linguistic changes, while scientific texts can diversely reorder sentences without deep alterations. Therefore, while poetry conveys its meaning polysemically, science does it univocally. For Della Volpe, this implies that poetic texts have semantic autonomy. Although all of poetry's linguistic elements belong to the entire social institution called *language*, it reshapes its meaning through peculiar and subtle *paraphrases*. On the contrary, science's language is, as he called it, "omni-contextual" because of "its semantic heteronomy or dependence on innumerable other contexts" (Della Volpe 1978: 115). To sum up, while poetry is highly sensitive to linguistic modifications, the limit of scientific paraphrases is only truth preservation.[6]

To end this section, I want to make a brief commentary on the critic's task according to Della Volpe. For him, poetic paraphrasing reshapes ordinary equivocal meanings to explore specific connotations, being the theoretical procedure to test the subtle semantic nature of poetry. Thus, paraphrasing is the literary critic's main theoretical tool. It allows the critic to identify the specific semantic handling of ordinary

[5] Because of lexical reasons associated with his canon of precision, Della Volpe decided to substitute *connotation* for *polysemic*. Thus, both terms are synonymous (Della Volpe 1978: 123).

[6] This point is entirely coincident with Quine's concerns with preserving truth. To read an example and some brief characterization of Quinean opacity, see McGregor (2015a: 347).

equivocal speech extracting connotations from diverse everyday mixtures of meanings, images, references, etc. According to him, criticism wonders "whether the text, as a whole or as an element, is something organic-contextual rather than something omni-contextual or even omni-textual" (Della Volpe 1978: 127). In that way, criticism explores how a poetic text gains its semantic autonomy or, in other words, through paraphrasing, criticism studies which semantic elements are reshaping ordinary speech.[7]

## 3. *Opacity and salva fictione*

The reader who connects Galvano Della Volpe's semantic theory and the contemporary philosophical frame is not entirely wrong. Keep in mind, for example, concepts such as *narrative opacity* (Lamarque 2014, 2015, 2017a) and *literary thickness* (McGregor 2015a, 2015b, 2016). According to Rafe MacGregor, literary works, both poetic and narrative, are highly sensitive to formal changes because content and form are *inseparable* (McGregor 2015a: 346). For its part, "the content of literary fictional narratives stands in a peculiarly intimate relation to the manner in which it is presented" (Lamarque 2014: 3). So, both philosophers argue for the peculiar relationship between contents and their modes of presentation, i.e.., their forms. Contents and forms are inseparable in *literary works*. Focusing my efforts this time on the Lamarquean opacity thesis, I want to show some convergences and divergences between his concept and Della Volpe's approach.[8] Let us consider the concept of *narrative opacity*. This counterpoint is useful to clarify two concepts of opacity, namely, as an intrinsic feature—Dellavolpean conception—and as a relational property—Lamarquean point of view.

As appeared at the beginning of *The opacity of narrative*, opacity seems to be an intrinsic property of texts. In fact, those who read the above quote on narrative opacity without any background thesis may think that opacity is not only a property of a literary work but of the text itself. A text would then be opaque if any change in its manner of presentation is also a change in its content. In that sense, textual opacity would depend on applying the principle of *salva fictione*. According to Lamarque and Haugom Olsen, while *salva vertitate* is the preserving truth principle, *salva fictione* aims to characterize literary fiction. That, of course, presupposes a distinction between preserving the truth and literature's intentions. A poetic text, namely, an opaque text, will be any text that subtly conveys its content by specific connotations. Two co-referential singular terms can substitute each other without affecting truth, but both do not necessarily convey equal connotations. Thus, it is possible to say that there is no notable difference between

[7] For a more detailed analysis of the Dellavolpean concept of paraphrasis see Marconi (2019).

[8] For my current focus, I leave the dialogue on McGregor's sound and interesting theses on narrative thickness for another occasion.

*opacity* and *polysemy*. Polysemic texts are those whose contents remain inseparable from their forms of presentation. Remembering that example from Gongora, "cada sol repetido es un cuerpo celeste sólido que deambula por el sistema solar" does not convey the same content as in the original version. For truth's sake, we can replace the original word "cometa" with one of their possible definitions. This, however, would not preserve the original literary content. The same can be said about opacity. The main point here is not, as Lamarque indicates (Lamarque 2014: 12, Lamarque 2015: 50), to defend the *unparaphrasable* character of literary works; on the contrary, paraphrasing is more than possible for any literary piece. In fact, Della Volpe would agree completely. The problem here is replacing an original literary redaction with a resulting paraphrase without losing the literary content.[9]

Nevertheless, months after its publication, *The opacity of narrative* received objections regarding precisely this point. Eva Maria Konrad, for example, pointed out the non-intrinsic character of opacity, saying that "opacity appears to be a 'feature of a "literary" reading of a work' (p. 68), but not of the work itself" (Konrad 2015: 1326). I agree with her on the relevance of that issue because "Lamarque repeatedly speaks of the 'opacity of narratives' (and not of the 'opacity of reading narratives') just as if opacity *were* a feature of certain texts" (ibid.). Sometimes, the book contains sentences where *opacity* is used as if opacity were an intrinsic property of literary texts. Indeed, the accurate Lamarquean expression should be "literary opacity," not merely "narrative opacity" because opacity's most important dimension lies not in its intrinsic semantic features but in the "propositional attitudes (such as thinking, imagining, believing) taken towards narrative content" (Lamarque 2015: 43).

From this issue follows an immediate result. Della Volpe talked about texts with intrinsic properties, so, according to him, any literary property can be reduced to semantic features. Lamarque, however, disagrees. This is, I think, peculiar because many reviewers have usually taken the bait. Indeed, they know that the theses defended in the chapter six of *The Opacity of Narrative* are based on a Wittgensteinian framework, where literature is conceived in terms of diverse institutional practices (Lamarque 2014). However, this thesis is not explicitly related to other theses defended by Lamarque in other contexts. For example, Laszlo Kajtar has written an illuminating review of *The opacity of narrative*, including some brief comments on chapter six on practices. His final remarks, however, are these:

> Despite the difficulties that the idea of opacity brings with it, it labels a persuasive account of what makes literary narratives special. On this view, lit-

[9] The question about form and content, or even form and meaning, in literature has been mostly set out through the paraphrase debate. We can consider it then as a way of thinking about the rational justification of literary value because its central point consists on the role of meaning, namely, textual features in literary appreciation (Currie and Frascaroli 2021; Kivy 2011; Lamarque 2009, 2014, 2017).

> erary narratives have distinct, inherent values independently of any actual reader's reaction to them. In order to benefit from the valuable literariness of these narratives, the reader has to attune him- or herself and assume the proper literary attitude that these texts demand (Kajtar 2015: 401)

The author is plenty aware of opacity as a non-intrinsic feature, but at the same time, he uses the term *text*; in that, a text demands such and such an attitude from the reader. However, if other Lamarquean theses are introduced, the lexical preferences mostly change. Using *text* to describe any literary work can be confusing because Lamarque explicitly distinguishes between *text* and *work*. Texts do not demand attitudes or *stances* (Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 32, Lamarque 2019: 476) but the works do. Following some formulae from McGregor, opacity is interest-relative because:

> The literary stance and the author's intention to invoke this stance are reliant upon the practice of literature, the set of concepts and conventions that constitute the institutional framework within which literary works are presented and received (McGregor 2015a: 344–345).

One text can never convey any *institutional a priori* stance because an institutional framework holds a particular literary stance *related to* reading. So, a literary work can demand literary attitudes, a text cannot. Three years after the publication of *The opacity of narrative*, Lamarque explicitly says from the very beginning that opacity *especially* refers to ways of reading dependent on institutional contexts: "To read for opacity is partly what it is to read 'from a literary point of view' or to read literature 'as literature'" (Lamarque 2017a: 105). If considered from a purely semantic Dellavolpean point of view, one text can be transparent or, in other words, univocal and even so opaque from the reader's point of view. A literary reading implies opacity, but such opacity could be excluded from the list of the text's intrinsic properties. This needs some comments.

We should explore these issues using the Lamarquean notion of interpretation (Lamarque 2000, 2002), his essentialist aesthetic theory (Lamarque 2010), his account of narrative practices (Lamarque 1990b, 2004, 2007b), and his discussion on the aestheticity of literature (Lamarque 2007a). For the sake of brevity, I introduce a sketch of his most relevant theses, which will be sufficient for my purposes.

A Text's identity criteria is, according to Lamarque, entirely different from those for literary works. A text "is an ordered set of sentence-types individuated at least partly by semantic and syntactic properties" (Lamarque 2000: 105); thus, two "texts are identical if they have the same semantic and syntactic properties, are in the same language, and consist of the same word-types and sentence- type ordered in the same way" (ibid.). That is no surprise at all. However, a literary work is not identical to a text in that framework. Why? Because literary works "are cultural objects, dependent on a practice governed by social conventions concerning the production and reception of texts" (ibid.). The

example usually offered to illustrate that thesis is from the playful J. L. Borges' *Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote*. I think, however, that it is not a good example because there is no comparison between a text and a literary work but two already consecrated literary pieces. That is not a minor point because a pure comparison between works and texts needs, in fact, two dimensions: first, seeing a text through purely linguistic glasses (syntaxis, morphology, semantics, etc.), and second, choosing a no-literary set of sentences. As I said, Lamarque's thesis is clear: no intrinsic textual property defines literariness. Therefore, a way of reading—or interpreting—is determined by conventions, not by intrinsic properties.

To some extent, when an institutional context turns a text into a literary work, it also stipulates, as it were, instructions for use. Since a text is subsumed under institutional conventions, for example, the literary fictional narrative conventions, the institution expects a particular fictive stance from the reader. At this point, it is clearer why Kajtar's interpretation needs an adjustment. No text demands an attitude from the reader because no text is intrinsically a literary work. Only an institutional context would confer such character. According to Lamarque, there are then three interpretative dimensions: first, the text as such; second, the text as a work; third, and finally, the work as an object-of-interpretation (Lamarque 2000: 109–111). Sometimes, he says, "so close is the linking of work and mode of interpretation that there is an inevitable blurring of what is 'in' a work […] and what is 'imputed to' it through interpretation" (Lamarque 2000: 119). This third dimension can be, as it were, naturalized in such a way that it can be regarded as an intrinsic work property and comprehended as an intrinsic textual property. The same can be said, for its part, of the narrative.

Of course, a literary narrative fiction is, before anything else, a narrative, namely a narrative text, so, as a simple hypothesis, the literary fictional character may be a narrative property. Lamarque's response, however, is negative. The conditions for a narrative are, he says, *minimal*. First, a narrative implies telling a story (Lamarque 2004: 394). Thus, the story "must be told," *not found* (ibid.). Furthermore, the story must convey "at least two events" connected not logically but loosely (ibid.) I return to this point shortly. Finally, every narrative implies "a temporal relation between the events, even if just that of simultaneity" (ibid.). According to Lamarque, if these are the necessary conditions for a narrative, there is only very general information to infer "from the premise that a piece of discourse is a narrative" (ibid.). From that minimal information, it would be conceptually impossible to classify the diverse types of narrative. To describe these minimal properties, it would then not be sufficient to, for example, draw any conclusion about literary narratives. Therefore, the literary character of a narrative could not be explained through any intrinsic narrative property *per se*.

Neither intrinsic textual nor specifically intrinsic narrative properties account for literary narrative fiction. From both analyses, the conclusion is the same: "the most fruitful way of drawing the distinctions that matter is in terms of narrative practices" (Lamarque 2004: 400). In other words, aesthetic or literary properties are not reducible to physical or textual properties. Arthur Danto's theses are presupposed in the argument as it would be possible for two identical texts to have different literary properties.[10] Therefore, the main Lamarquean conclusion is that "works of art are identifiable not only by […] textual properties for the literary arts- but by complex relational properties which embed the works in an […] institutional […] context" (Lamarque 2010: 105). Any hypothesis on the supervenience of literary properties from textual, narrative ones is thus discarded. Literariness does not *supervene* from any set of textual properties.

As Lamarque defines it, I conclude that opacity is not an intrinsic textual property but an intrinsic property of *literary works*. Every literary work brings its own instructions for reading, and opacity is precisely the stance determined by the practice of literary narrative fiction. Thus, its special intrinsic character has all to do with conventions rather than narrative properties themselves. Della Volpe then no longer agrees with Lamarque. Since *polysemy* is inherent to literary texts, literary texts are necessarily polysemic for him. However, he did not recognize the institutional dimension involved in the very idea of a literary work, so he tried to reduce literature only to semantic aspects. Texts, not works are, for him, the key to interpretation.

Thus, both conceptions of literature engage with two diverse conceptions of the aesthetic justification of literary value. On the one hand, Della Volpe argues for a justification based on textual properties using paraphrasing procedures on texts as an argument for literary value. On the other, Lamarque emphasizes the role of perspectivism triggered by thought-clusters (Lamarque 2014: 142). In other words, while Della Volpe was interested in the particular semantic changes once narrative treatments handle ordinary concepts, Lamarque is interested in the *ways of reading* multiple narrative layers.[11] As I understand their theses, meaning and appreciation seem almost mutually exclusive.

[10] Again, an important point here has to do with the philosophical interpretation of Borges' *Pierre Menard: autor del Quijote*. For Danto, the Borgean story is a hidden premise to extend his conclusions on Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* to literature (Danto 1984: 14). Some other interpretations, however, disagree with him because they do not recognize philosophical questions but literary ones. For B. R. Tilghman, for example, "Pierre Menard" says "something […] about how we read and describe works of literature" (Tilghman 1982: 297), however "Danto has converted this piece of criticism into a piece of philosophy" (ibid.). Peter Lamarque, for his part, seems to partially accept Danto's point of view (Lamarque 2000: 105).

[11] Questioning Peter Kivy's point of view, Lamarque says "Bradley's central concerns are less about paraphrase, more about value, less about what poems mean, more about how to read poetry" (Lamarque 2009: 403). That quote applies to the Lamarquean thesis too.

However, what if opacity, textually considered, implies a cognoscitive level where we can find semantic peculiarities as much as aesthetic appreciation? Let us consider the Lamarquean opacity as an aesthetic stance.

## 4. *Fill in the Blanks*

The problem I see emerges from that curious Lamarquean clause that I quote again: "at least two events must be depicted in a narrative and there must be some more or less loose, albeit non-logical, relation between the events" (Lamarque 2004: 394). These two adjectives—loose and non-logical—are notably informative, at least from a Dellavolpean point of view, because they point out basic semantic features of narrative. Carefully read, this passage seems to say that trying to read a narrative text logically organized as narrative literature would be a bit frustrating. If this point is conceded, it is necessary to distinguish between a textual opacity (T-opacity) and a literary opacity (L-opacity).[12] There are opaque and transparent texts, for example, transparent essays whose contents remain consistently organized, following the virtues of philosophical or scientific texts (Rescher 2007). While opaque essays will be those whose content remain confusing, inconsistent, incomplete, not entirely assertive, and so on. Lamarque has focused on opacity as a stance, but, as I argue, a minimal T-opacity stipulates some way of reading that L-opacity alone cannot determine. Literary opacity is then impossible when a transparent text is read, although the same philosophical framework is brought into play, whether it is literature or visual art, the studied object, narrative literature, implies necessarily non-relational properties, unlike objects such as Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes.[13] Thus, it is necessary to rethink the concept of narrative transparency because a logically organized narrative determines its interpretation beyond any institutional context. In brief, Lamarque seems to say that if one reads a transparent fictional text, that is, a systematic organization of fictional events, then there would be no place for literary narrative. So, I argue that there would be no possibility to L-opaquely read a T-transparent text because a T-transparent text obstructs the minimal conditions for narrative literary reading. Therefore, the Lamarquean condition of the narrative is not so minimal.

Indeed, it is unclear how to read some texts literally. Many contemporary literary pieces ask for another type of stance or even reject any standard propositional attitude. If that is true, it is false that every literary narrative fiction gives an interpretation key, which is,

[12] I prefer "literary opacity" to "narrative opacity" precisely because "narrative" is not identical, in Lamarquean terms, to "literary narrative fiction," which, for its part, establishes opacity as a suitable way of reading, not an intrinsic textual property.

[13] To clearly understand this distinction between monadic and relational predicates see Danto (1971: 12).

in fact, ever polemic in criticism history. We can find an example in interpreters of Franz Kafka's prose who have tried to read his works to infer T-transparent messages reducible to philosophical or doctrinal programs.[14] Let me clarify this point.

Marthe Robert, a great Kafka interpreter, has pointed out the enormous literary damage caused by attempting to reduce Kafka's literary writings to doctrinal principles (Robert 1969: 33 f.). According to her, Kafka's prose intrinsically rejects any attempt at L-transparent reading because it seems to be *T-opaque*, not merely because our way of reading is opaque (L-opaque). So, Kafka's literary opacity is not only the result of an active propositional attitude triggered by the reader but an intrinsic semantic property. Theological interpretations of *The trial* have failed, for example, because explicit and implicit fictional facts provide several counterexamples to them (Robert 1969: 36). If Josef K is a "new Job heroically arguing with God" Robert says, the fictional court could be divine, but, actually, it is not because it is located at "an awful, popular building, riddle with children; the lawyer does not defend Josef K […] K. finds only one man, who like him has been accused […], which implies that everybody is at peace with justice" (Robert 1969: 37).[15] So, trying a *T-transparent reading* of *The trial* entails reducing its narrative fictional character to a transparent textual discourse according to standards of theoretical writing. A transparent textual reading should then be consistent, ambiguous, or polysemic. Clearly, we expect this from philosophical writings that follow a certain canon of scientific-like rigorous production (Rescher 2007: 2), but not from literature. To put that even clearer, when the theoretical procedure to read literature consists of attributing some hidden doctrinal sense or meaning, what I call *T-transparent reading*, the whole fictional narrative information must satisfy every consequence from that sense or meaning. In brief, "reducing" refers to producing an interpretative model to recognize cohesive connections between facts in fiction, all of them consistent with a theoretical sentence. Therefore, a "transparent" textual reading is defined as an interpretative model working as a function that consistently attributes a doctrinal sense, usually under the form of theoretical sentences, to every fictional fact.

The above case, for example, shows a theological hypothesis, which plays the role of the transparent textual message, and the procedure it requires to confirm its content. If *The trial* uncovers a theological sense, every conceptual matrix implied by the theological theory in question should be satisfied by every fictional fact. However, it is not my general point that these criticism procedures are essentially misguided. Instead, Robert specifically argues that Kafka's literature obstructs these

[14] Theodor W. Adorno, for example, was interested in discussing what he called "illustrated ontology," indicating all those interpretations that have tried to translate whole global narrative fictions into doctrinal existentialist or theological theses (Adorno 1986).

[15] My translation.

procedures, and *The trial* as a fictional text, not as a work, blocks them. Whatever the case may be, she and her counterparts have a cognoscitive interest in literature, which involves the fictional narrative texts as the justification exchanged in literary polemics. The narrative itself is then blocking any attempt to be reduced to only one interpretation. A L-opaque reading of *The trial* seems to be determined by its T-opaque narrative itself. Even if we try to T-transparent read some works, they block the attempts. That, of course, does not define them as literary, but an opaque literary work would not be possible if a text were not intrinsically opaque.

So far, it could be thought that I deny any role to institutional conventions, and I fall into what Gregory Currie calls "textualism" (Currie 1991). However, I simply argue that institutional literary rules do not determine every right stance entirely. Rather, literature merely requests to set aside any tendency *to resolve* the textual opacity. While a reader tries to read a T-opaque text, sometimes he or she tries also to identify the textual sources of opacity and conjecture possible fictional scenarios to reduce the entire set of narrative sentences to a coherent global interpretation. That is the kind of criticism against which Robert tried to defend Kafka, consisting of bringing the game of science into play (Albrecht and Edward 1993). On the contrary, a reader plays the institutional game of literature when one inhibits the tendency to consider polysemy as a theoretical problem. Instead, the reader intentionally engages with opacity as an intrinsic textual property under the form of textual lacunae, omissions, gaps, or inconsistencies. L-opacity, thus, is nothing more than embracing a T-opaque text without seeking complete coherence and cohesion.[16] An example can be helpful to comprehend this point better.

At the beginning of *The trial*, we can read this: "Someone must have been telling tales about Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything wrong, he was arrested" (Kafka 2009: 5). As I see it, this passage resembles crime fiction because it sets out a riddle, in this case, in the form of two acknowledged facts, a presupposition, a problem, and finally a hypothesis. The two explicit fictional facts are that Josef K. was arrested and that he has done anything wrong. However, keeping in mind the first fact, we can reinterpret the second one tacitly pointing out one presupposition: *someone is arrested if they have done something wrong*. Now, the reader knows that he or she encounters the work's premature climax introduction because it raises two main questions: How was it possible for an arrest to have taken place without something wrong having been done? What is the meaning of "wrong," according to this piece of fiction? That opening passage offers a hypothesis: "Someone must have been telling tales about Josef K." So, at

[16] Wolfgang Iser see this when he says that "The indeterminate sections or gaps of literary texts are in no way to be regarded as a defect; on the contrary, they are a basic element for the aesthetic response" (Iser 1997: 197)

least three more questions arise: who has been telling tales about Josef K? What exactly could someone have said about him? Why has Justice accepted those hypothetical lies? A riddle appears, asking for solutions from more fictional information, which the reader tries to find, becoming a detective. The novel, however, blocks any attempt to collect consistent fictional facts to satisfy a unique set of responses to those riddles. In this sense, the novel is "undecidable" because no unique interpretation can be satisfied by the entire set of fictional facts.[17] For example, Josef K is arrested, but peculiarly the guards say nothing about the charges or any institutional detail about the trial. The novel does not give the reader all the information needed to understand the development of the fictional facts. Instead, the novel increasingly adds more questions. As an illustration, the same can be said, for example, about the idea of arrest the novel introduces:

> 'I presume you'll want to go to the bank now?' 'To the bank?' K. asked […] That was why he repeated, 'How can I go to the bank when I've been arrested?' 'Oh', said the supervisor, who was already at the door, 'you have misunderstood me. Yes, you have been arrested, but that should not prevent you from going to work. Nor should anything prevent you from going about your daily life as usual.' 'Then being arrested is not too bad', said K., going up close to the supervisor. 'I never meant it in any other way', the latter said. (Kafka 2009: 14).

An arrest is the novel's focus, but curious fictional information does not entirely satisfy all the reader's expectations triggered by the concept of "arrest" because the above example sets out an inconsistency between a standard concept and what is possible to Josef K despite being arrested. If opacity and transparency were just propositional attitudes, then inconsistency would be merely the reader's inhibition of *ad hoc* hypotheses that occasionally could turn the inconsistent members compatible. The propositional attitude is based on the fictional information provided by the narrative text itself. Even if the reader were interested in solving the contradiction between the arrest at large and the arrest-according-to-fiction, putting into play hermeneutic principles of scientific reading, the fictional narration itself would not provide any other information to dissolve the inconsistency. Therefore, T-opacity is a necessary condition for L-opacity. In such sketch, the role of narrative as a type of text is different from that of the Lamarquean approach. According to Lamarque's theses, since L-opacity is neither identical to, nor supervenient from, textual properties, L-opacity is independent of T-opacity. This independence, however, is not consistent with the practices of literary criticism. Usually if there is no textual evidence being discussed, literary interpretations turn arbitrary. That is, in fact, Robert's point. Literary narrative fictions compel us to map the liter-

[17] I borrow the expression "undecidable" from Michael Riffaterre and Tzvetan Todorov (Riffaterre 1981). the term also points out a distant analogy from mathematical logic that implies "the decision problem" (Grädel, Otto, Rosen 1999).

ary opacity from the textual properties. In this sense, narrative texts control the possible arbitrariness of criticism.

As I said, opacity is, in the Lamarquean sense, a propositional attitude or stance. Like any other artistic stance, literary opacity does not supervene, for Lamarque, from any textual feature. My point, however, is that there would be no literary opacity without an opaque textual narrative, which counts as an intrinsic textual property. In this sense, the literary stance for narrative literary fiction is determined by the interaction between some acquired institutional conventions and the particular textual narrative. Therefore, some texts require from us readers a transparent reading, others an *undecidable* opacity, and even others both stances. However, a strong sense of literary opacity is not possible without texts whose contents challenge our ordinary conceptual expectations, as in *The trial*.

Sometimes, criticism plays the game of attributing such and such meanings to analyzed works, sometimes not. Even so, what seems to guide the reader's behavior is not an *a priori* propositional attitude but the interaction between reader and text. In this sense, arguing the essential character of any stance contradicts the practices of literary criticism. Thus, the philosophy of literature seems to contradict literary criticism because philosophy explicitly argues that "interpretation in the context of poetry is not centrally involved with meaning, so much as with recovering broader kinds of achievement" (Lamarque 2009: 417), or that "[i]t is instructive to think of a certain species of poetic interpretation less as a search for meaning more as a way of encouraging a sharing from one reader to another of the experience a lyric can offer" (Lamarque 2017b: 70), or even that "a central component of literary interpretation properly so called […] has less to do with meaning as such […] than with appreciation of a special kind" (Lamarque 2002: 290). So, poetry, as well as narrative fiction, is understood under the same thesis, namely, the literary interpretation is a particular form of aesthetic appreciation, which involves, for its part, no place for a search for meanings. Hence, opacity is the special aesthetic quality of narrative literature, which implies, not an interest in a cognoscitive use of narrative texts, *but* an aesthetic one, orienting attention "to the capacity to present particularities *perspectivally* and literally in thought-provoking ways" (Lamarque 2014: 167). Just like Marthe Robert questions the idea of a unique interpretation of Kafka's literature, the artworld also discusses the old question of interpretative arbitrariness. Appreciation and meaning (and, for its part, literature cognitive powers) are not mutually exclusive aspects of literature. In fact, considering narrative features, involving meaning, seems to be an essential part of aestetically appreciating literature.

Arbitrariness in criticism is not a trivial problem. Indeed, it is a counter-intuitive outcome from criticism's attempt to explain notably heterogeneous practices such as narrative literary fiction and conceptual artworks through the same theoretical framework. This is not

due to any theoretical mistake; rather, it has all to do with the role of texts and objects involved in the institutional practice of art. Talking about arbitrary interpreters of Marcel Duchamp's *The Great Glass*, Calvin Tomkins refers to "an international tribe whose numbers increase each year" (Tomkins 2014: 1), whose aim is still "to unlock the mystery" of "delay," a word used by Duchamp himself to describe his work. This tribe, says Tomkins, has tried *to link* Duchamp's work to Henry Bergon's philosophy, alchemy, or even incest. As an extreme example, Tomkins adds: "One Duchampian has suggested that it be read as an anagram for 'lad[e]y', so that 'delay in glass' becomes glass lady" (Tomkins 2014: 1–2). Only *The Green Box* paratextually could intervene in those criticism's random elucubrations. The risk then involved in contemporary conceptual art is precisely the arbitrariness of interpretation. In cases where the physical objects themselves cannot immediately control the absolute non-sense, the epistemic intervention of paratexts is necessary, such as in *The Green Box* for *The Great Glass*. Other examples can be more illustrative, especially those from the *performance* world or the *bioartworld*. Instances from these practices usually entail no connection at all between physical support and the playful game of interpretation. Literature, on the contrary, frequently needs its analogous support to those absent physical objects, e.g., literary texts. Even the most radical modernist novels exert an epistemic control on the opening range of possible interpretations.

## 5. *Conclusion*

Perceptual information is not useful for justifying our aesthetic interpretations in the artworld of abstract artifacts. As Arthur Danto noted in the sixties, being a bit informed about the history of American conceptual art is necessary to appreciate Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* aesthetically. So, in the game of knowing customary artistic theories and their history lies the thin red line between being distracted in the face of artworks that seem real things or being aware of their aesthetic status. However, literature—even the most modernist literature—opens its aesthetic doors without very demanding theoretical conditions, providing us with narrative interpretative keys. Thus, the institution of literature can agree or not with a clueless person about literary issues, but it rarely makes possible a *Testadura*. Through narrative and fictional features, literature engages the whole universe of the reader's concepts so that appreciating literature aesthetically also involves questions on meaning. Therefore, the aesthetic dimension of literature seems to require its specific theoretical model.

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# *Notes On Reading*

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*Reading starts with the act of perception and rapidly moves into an area concerning the recognition of written words. Word recognition consists of two aspects (functioning simultaneously and working in parallel): the phonological—converting groups of letters into sounds—and the lexical—giving access to a mental dictionary of the meaning of words. But what does the act of reading consist of? According to Peter Kivy, there is a parallel between reading texts and reading scores. And what about the reasons for reading? When we read, we are not just interested in understanding what the signs stand for, but we also activate memory, perception, problem-solving, and reasoning, and our attention is also devoted to identifying those characteristics of texts which help categorize them as works of a specific genre. Readers play a central role: without them and their activity, there would be nothing but a page of black spots. As they read and understand, readers propositionally imagine what is written and, at a further level, they may also imagine objectually and simulatively. These objects come into being thanks to the words that we imagine are similar to what Roman Ingarden sees as a skeleton, needing the experience of reading to be appropriately concretized.*

**Keywords:** Reading; understanding; imagination.

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"I wish you to gasp not only at what you read
but at the miracle of its being readable."
Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale fire*

The aim of this paper is to investigate the act of reading by combining empirical and philosophical approaches to literature. Specific issues concerning reading will be taken into account, from the typically neuropsychological aspects (I), to the experience of reading (II), the connection between reading, understanding, and imagining (III), the phenomenon of re-reading and its relevance for aesthetic appreciation (IV), with a final consideration on the specific activity the reader is asked to achieve in order to grasp the complexity of the literary work (V). These notes, however disconnected they may appear from one another, are intended to suggest how complex and multifaceted the phenomenon of reading is and how many different points of view may be adopted to display all the richness and irreducibility of the object in question. The idea is to shed some light on different aspects of reading (whether we consider it as an act of perception, of decoding, of understanding, of imagining, of interpreting, or of appreciating) and show why asking some questions about it may be justified.

## *I.*

What means *reading* a literary work, and reading it well? That's the question asked by Virginia Woolf in *How Should One Read a Book?* where she defends the reader's freedom and alerts against bringing baggage and pre-conceived notions during the reading activity:

> Few people ask from books what books can give us. Most commonly we come to books with blurred and divided minds, asking of fiction that it shall be true, of poetry that it shall be false, of biography that it shall be flattering, of history that it shall enforce our own prejudices. If we could banish all such preconceptions when we read, that would be an admirable beginning. Do not dictate to your author; try to become him. Be his fellow-worker and accomplice. If you hang back, and reserve and criticize at first, you are preventing yourself from getting the fullest possible value from what you read. But if you open your mind as widely as possible, then signs and hints of almost imperceptible fineness, from the twist and turn of the first sentences, will bring you into the presence of a human being unlike any other. Steep yourself in this, acquaint yourself with this and soon you will find that your author is giving you, or attempting to give you, something far more definite (Woolf [1932] 1965: 257).

So the reader is free to understand and imagine from what is written in the text whatever she likes (even if always starting from the text, and respecting it). But—before literal understanding and interpretation take place—what does it mean *to read* a text? And *how should one read*?

The spontaneous and naïve answer is that the best way of reading is from left to right (even if most of the modern languages, but not all of them are left-to-right languages: in actual fact Arabic, Hebrew, Persian,

and Urdu, are right-to-left) and from the top to the bottom—but clearly this reply does not seem to be particularly enlightening or useful.

In any case, what is important to keep in mind is that reading starts with an act of perception, with the processing of letter strings, i.e., in order to be able to read we first need to be able to decode what we perceive (see or touch[1]—but here I will just take into consideration the act of reading with eyes) and then to individuate the connections subsisting between the sentence components.

Reading starts in our brain like any other visual stimulation, i.e., in the general visual areas of the occipital pole of the brain, but rapidly moves into an area concerning the recognition of written words. The cognitive neuroscientist S. Dehaene ([2007] 2009) extensively explains how the functioning of reading—particularly interesting because the human brain does not have specific structures dedicated to a written language that evolved biologically, since writing and reading are cultural inventions, not biological facts—is based on some specificities of the eye, the organ receiving the visual input. The retina—thanks to its central part named *fovea* containing high-resolution cells—elaborates visual information, i.e., those small prints on the page, first by recognizing letters and the way they combine into the written word, and second by connecting them to the brain systems for coding of speech sounds and for meaning. And all this happens in a very short time: we recognize sixteen letters in less than a quarter of a second and identify and understand something like two/three hundred words in a minute. The secret behind this incredible performance, Dehaene maintains, is a form of "neural recycling": when we learn to read, our brain recycles structures that biological evolution has given us to process visual stimuli such as objects and faces, by transforming them in highly efficient programs for identifying letters and words.[2]

When our eyes perceive those black marks on the page, we identify letters and their combinations as known elements—and here the information processed is purely visual: we do not *understand* the meaning of the word, we just recognize it as an object—then we either get an access to the meaning followed by the conversion of a written word into phonemes or we

[1] In order to read by touch the universally adopted system is *Braille* (from Louis Braille's invention in 1824), consisting of a code of sixty-three characters embossed on paper that can be read by passing fingers over the page. Although the finger can read only one braille character at a time, the brain processes words at a higher level.

[2] Reading is therefore related to the simultaneous processes of *decoding* and *encoding*. When processing written input, apparently we are not disturbed by varying letter shapes or sizes, we recognize what does not change by grasping the letter common traits (invariants). To explain how our brain deals with invariants, Dehaene presents the following hypothesis: "every written word is probably encoded by a hierarchical tree in which letters are grouped into larger size units, which are themselves grouped into syllables and words" ([2007] 2009: 22). According to his view people naturally focus on morphemes during the word recognition process and move through different levels of representation to get to meaning. The input of the visual form is then encoded and gradually recoded in connection to a mental lexicon.

transform string letters directly into linguistic sounds. These different stages are closely connected and functionally independent. Their being functionally independent gives further reasons to the neuroscientific assumption (Kemmerer 2015: 229) according to which there are at least *two routes* to reading: the so called *semantical/lexical one* (from visual feature analysis and letter identification to orthographic lexicon and semantic system followed by phonological lexicon) and the *phonological one* (from visual feature analysis and letter identification to grapheme-phoneme conversion and phoneme system). Dehaene as well works on these two aspects, functioning simultaneously and working in parallel: the one, *phonological*—converting groups of letters into sounds—and the other, *lexical*—giving access to a mental dictionary of the meaning of words.

How does one learn *how* to read? According to Uta Frith (1985) reading is something we learn to do, it is an ongoing process that cannot be rushed and which develops through three different stages: the *pictorial* stage, the *phonological* stage, and the *orthographic* stage. The pictorial stage has to do with the recognition of words as objects and it is typically based on visual features (shape, color, letters' form). The second stage consists in becoming aware of phonemes: words are decoded into letters and letters are connected to sounds, i.e., graphemes develop in phonemes. Finally, the last stage is the orthographic one where there is a huge lexicon of visual units and reading is faster or slower depending on the occurrence of rare or more frequent words. Nonetheless, Dehaene insists on the fact that we "do not fully understand the causal chain that links visual and linguistic acquisition. Must a child first analyze speech inputs into phonemes in order to figure out the meaning of letters? Alternatively, does the child understand the nature of the letter code before he discovers that speech is made up of phonemes? This is probably just another 'chicken and egg' problem. The two types of learning are so tightly linked that it is impossible to tell which comes first, the grapheme or the phoneme—both arise together and enhance each other" ([2007] 2009: 202). Learning graphemes and phonemes—typical of decoding processes in reading—therefore seem to happen simultaneously in a sort of spiral causality, and attention has to be driven to both speech sounds and understanding of letters in a continuum process.

## *II.*

So experimental research tries to explain the basis of reading and its development, precisely starting from the eyes—and remember that the "keenest of our senses is the sense of sight" as Cicero underlined (1967: II, 87: 357). One could argue whether such perceptual and neuropsychological approach to our reading experience is somehow relevant for literary appreciation (Lamarque 2019). We think it is, for the naïve—but no less important—reason that without scanning what is written

with our eyes (or either listening to what is being read or following with fingers a braille text) we would have no access to any literary work.[3] Therefore this first perceptual approach, far from being irrelevant, proves its being fundamental (even if it does not turn novels, stories, and poetry into perceptual objects).

And what does the act of reading consist in? How to explain it? According to Peter Kivy (2006, 2010)—who sees literary works as performances—there is a parallel between reading texts and reading scores. He bases his theory of reading on the metaphysical type-token distinction (even if intended differently from the way most philosophers have considered it, i.e., tokens—book's copies—as the instantiations of the type): "You have your copy of *Pride and Prejudice* and I have mine. But, I would urge, our copies of the novel are not tokens of the type *Pride and Prejudice*, any more than our scores of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* are tokens of the type Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. All of the many copies of *Pride and Prejudice* are tokens of a type, but that type is not the work: it is the notation of the work" (Kivy 2006: 4). According to Kivy literary work types are instantiated by their readings and those readings are performances even when they are silent, as when one reads just for oneself (the way the experience of reading is nowadays mostly accomplished is alone and in silence). The main thesis of reading as performance is defended on the one hand by appealing to the history of literature (originally poems were merely orally transmitted, and therefore considered as forms of performance art) and on the other by working on the parallel between the silent reading of literary works and the silent reading of musical scores. I will not take into specific consideration the claim Kivy makes regarding the type-token distinction founded on the historical development of oral literary cultures nor will I advance general objections to his metaphysical assumptions. What I would like to focus on is the parallel Kivy establishes between silent contemporary readers and rhapsodes such as Ion in Plato's famous dialogue who, Kivy explains, "not only recited or sung the narration, and the characters' speeches, perhaps impersonating the dramatis personae with gesture and voice; he also, in his performance, made interpretive remarks about the meaning of the poems he was performing" (Kivy 2006: 9). From this Kivy goes on pointing out that silent readers too both perform what they read and interpret it as they go along. "It is my thesis"— Kivy says— "that in silent reading of fictional works, I am a performer, my reading a performance of the

[3] As F. Sibley explains, far from being irrelevant, our first, perceptual, approach is indispensable for any aesthetic appreciation: "People have to *see* the grace or unity of work, *hear* the plaintiveness or frenar in the music, *notice* the gaudiness of a color scheme, *feel* the power of a novel, its mood, or its uncertainty of tone. They may be struck by these qualities at once, or they may come to perceive them only after repeated viewings, hearings, or readings, and with the help of critics. But unless they do perceive them for themselves, aesthetic enjoyment, appreciation, and judgment are beyond them [...] the crucial thing is to see, hear or feel" (Sibley 1965: 137).

work. It is a silent performance, in the head. I am enacting, silently, the part of the storyteller" (Kivy 2006: 63).

But does this correspond to what always happens? When a reader's silent activity is just interested in grasping meanings or in what the text is about, would that reading count as a performance as well? According to Kivy these expressionless readings would somehow fail to be performance readings because they wouldn't imply a deep understanding and interpretation of the work. But what about the silent reading of *Anna Karenina* made by a nine years old child? However inspired it might be, it would of course lack both profound understanding (what can a child know about marriage and family life, love and jealousy, adultery and social conventions?) and literary interpretation (he has never read anything of that sort). So, should we consider his silent reading as not a performance at all?

In order to better understand let's try to focus on the analogy between literature and music as far as silent reading of texts and scores is concerned. "One can silently read a musical score and, through the silent reading, 'hear' in one's mind the musical work: a realization of the sound of the work. One can 'hear' a production in the mind' (Kivy 2006: 36); likewise "when we read poetry silently to ourselves, we 'voice' in our heads […] It is simply the verbal analogue of the phenomenon of score-reading" (Kivy 2006: 55). Hence, exactly as it happens with the silent reading of music, "all readers of literary texts—of novels, poems, stories—must have some interpretation or other of what they read" (Kivy 2006: 40). But here the counterexample with the nine years old child reading *Anna Karenina* is back again. And think also about all those readers non particularly literary well-trained—their silent readings wouldn't count properly as performances since they couldn't be considered as "silent Ions" interpreting the work both in the sense of performing and in the sense of understanding and interpreting its meaning. Here the difference between reading a literary text and reading a score becomes evident: whereas one can read a score without being able to perform it silently (because one has no skill in music) but exactly knowing the notes they are (if one reads the score of the final—the fourth—movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Symphony n. 9* one reads: e e f g g f e d c c, and so on), one cannot read silently "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" without in the meantime knowing how it does sound, because as psychological research has shown, in reading grapheme and phoneme arise together and develop in parallel, even when the meaning of those marks on the page is not definite—one can read sentences even if not grasping their meaning.[4]

[4] As would happen for instance to someone reading the first lines of Goethe's poem *Mignon* and not knowing German enough: "Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn, | Im dunkeln Laub die Goldorangen glühn, | Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht, | Die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht? | Kennst du es wohl? Dahin! Dahin | Möcht' ich mit dir, o mein Geliebter, ziehn!".

Another important disanalogy between reading literature and reading texts has to do with what will be taken into account in the next paragraph and that we can provisionally call the "filling" or "enrichment" the reader is always supposed to engage in when approaching a literary text. Reading is always an activity where the reader brings interpretive skills to the very act of reading: we fill out the text to complete (always and never fully) somehow its meaning. But reading scores does not seem to work this way, there is no enrichment needed, the notes to be played are all there on the score. That is an important sense in which reading text is a performance, but reading scores is not.

These are some of the difficulties Kivy's thesis, taken in its strong version, should try to give an answer. Nonetheless, neuroscientists have shown the plausibility of such a hypothesis by tracking and comparing eye movements in ten musicians as they silently read six texts and six pieces of music for piano: the music was contemporary and the texts were literary (Cara and Vera 2016). Despite the fact that musicians used different strategies for processing verbal and musical information, no cross-patterns of individual reading strategies were observed between conditions. Although the underlying processes are different, resource-sharing between the two domains, this research says, cannot be ruled out.

Another interesting neuro-approach to investigate the acceptability of Kivy's thesis is the one by Couvignou et al. (2019) who worked on eventual co-occurrence between developmental dyslexia and congenital amusia in adults (a database of online musical tests on 18.000 participants was analyzed). Self-reported dyslexic participants performed significantly lower on melodic skills than matched controls, suggesting a possible link between reading and musical disorders. The results of this study pointed to a moderate co-morbidity between amusia and dyslexia (but, as Couvignou et al. underline, further research is needed to determine what factors at the neural and/or cognitive levels are responsible for this co-occurrence).

## *III.*

After having seen how we read and learn reading, and what that activity could be seen as consisting in, now try to see *why do we read*, i.e., what we gain thanks to this quite strenuous occupation. When we read we are primarily interested in understanding what those signs stand for (because if we do not reach the first, semantic level, we cannot go further), what is the meaning of the sequence of sentences together with their specific discourse context (fundamental for comprehension—out of context sentences are often ambiguous). These sentences can be about the real world or about an imaginary one—the distinction between the two is not relevant as far as basic understanding is concerned—they refer to a state, event or action and often have a truth

value with respect to the real or the invented world.[5] When reading we also activate memory, perception, problem solving, and reasoning (Graesser, Millis and Zwaan 1997) and our attention is devoted in identifying those characteristics of texts which are standard, contra-standard and variable and that may help categorizing them as works of a specific genre (Cfr. Walton 1970 and Friend 2012).

Once grasping the meaning of the sentences and somehow identifying the literary genre each specific text belongs to (or is supposed to), readers often ask a question such as "What does the author want to say?" and the like. Readers try to conceptually connect the statements of the text in order to obtain coherence and assume information given in the text as somehow justified. They also take for granted that the role of the author—between what is said and what is not—is a fundamental one.

Needless to say, in that experience readers do play a central role: it is thanks to them that it is possible to focus on *what we see when we read* (as the title of the famous book by Peter Mendelsund says[6]). And what we see are not just written signs, because through the meanings we grasp and with the help of imagination, we get the literary content, i.e., the characters and the events those words are meant to describe. And how does this happen? As we read and understand, we propositionally imagine (Stock 2017: 20–21) what we read by representing to ourselves that something is the case: for example, I might imagine that Anna is arriving at the railway station. Imagining propositionally (which does not require mental imagery, as Kendall Walton explains, "imagining can occur without imagery" Walton 1990: 13) therefore means to stand in some mental relation to a particular proposition, i.e., literary works—fictional and non-fictional ones—call for propositional imagining.[7] Take for instance the opening words of Albert Camus' *The Stranger*: "Maman died today".[8] It consists of a simple sentence explic-

[5] I will not examine in depth here the topic concerning the fiction/non-fiction distinction, nor will I focus on what is the distinction in reading something we believe being fictional or not. Let me just remember that most contemporary philosophers (Gregory Currie, David Davies, Kathleen Stock, Kendall Walton) consider the fiction/non-fiction distinction as fundamental when reading literature and see it as corresponding to the belief/imagination distinction. Different from this mainstream are Stacie Friend's and Derek Matravers' positions. According to Friend there is no sharp distinction between fiction and non-fiction and when reading "we focus on different features of the work, taking some aspects as more salient and foregrounding these whilst leaving others in the background" (Friend 2012:198); according to Matravers "we should give up the claim that there are essential differences between reading something as fiction and reading something as non-fiction. There are no essential differences; at best, there are differences in emphasis" (Matravers 2016: 181).

[6] Mendelsund 2014.

[7] Stock (2017: 20–29, 187–191).

[8] The complete beginning by Camus' masterpiece is the following: "Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: 'Mother

itly containing the proposition *that maman died today*, and that's what we imagine. Of course, not all sentences we find in literary texts express complete propositions, as happens when we have exclamations, rhetorical questions, and direct speech, where propositions are just implied, as at the beginning of Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*: "And—And—What comes next?".[9] When we read a text and understand it—at its basic level—we imagine the propositions it directly expresses or implies, whereas when we get the words without grasping their meaning we simply let them flow in our minds. Nonetheless, imagining propositionally (even if the first step) proves being not enough, because even if we imagine that p—that Anna is arriving at the railway station—we seem to lack what could be seen as a deep insight into the work. Actually, in a literal sense it is true to say that, when reading the sentence written by Tolstoy, we do imagine that Anna is arriving at the railway station. This is what is true in the fiction. But, as Lamarque explains, "this misses all that an opaque reading has to offer […]. And it gives no useful insight into the kind of experience that is characteristic of literary engagement" (Lamarque 2017: 111). I think this point is important and needs to be kept in mind. However, I do not see it as incompatible with further developments resulting from our reading and understanding of the text—let me explain.

Actually, when reading and being involved with literary texts at a further level, one can as well *imagine objectually*—representing to oneself a real or make-believe entity or situation (Yablo 1993)—and *imagine simulatively*—representing to oneself some sort of experience (Walton 1990). But whereas propositional imagining can take place without the former ones, neither objectual nor simulative imaginings can occur independently of propositional imagining: when one objectually imagines Anna Karenina also propositionally imagines that there is Anna Karenina—but not the reverse, in fact one can imagine that there is Anna Karenina without imagining her such and such. Moreover, this is also compatible with what Zeman, Dawar and Della Salla mean by "'aphantasia' to refer to a condition of reduced or absent voluntary imagery" (Zeman, Dawar and Della Salla 2015: 379). This inability to visualize any mental image, first described by Francis Galton (1880), concerns completely or partially lacking the ability to visualize or recall images (and often also words, sounds, tastes, and smells). And even if lacking mental imagery, these people still have propositional imagining, which specifically consist of standing in some mental relation to a proposition. This gives further support to the thesis according to which whereas propositional imagination has to do with understanding, objectual imagination has to be considered as a perception-like experience (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002). Nevertheless, even if objectual

deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours'. That doesn't mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday" (Camus [1942] 1989).

[9] Mann [1901] 1994.

imagining implies imagining an object with some specific properties, that very same object will never be fully determinate, the author has inevitably left some parts or characteristics *empty*.[10]

Hence those objects that come into being thanks to words and that we imagine are not complete ones, but are more similar to what Roman Ingarden sees as a schema or a skeleton ("what is in question here are […] certain *idealizations*, which are, so to speak, a *skeleton*, a *schema*, of concrete, flowing transitory aspects" Ingarden [1965] 1973: 262), needing the attention of reading to be appropriately concretized.[11] The schema need to be concretized because in actual fact, when writers describe characters, they do so with a few linguistic brush strokes, and readers have the task of filling in the gaps, not only by trying to complete what is ontologically incomplete, but also by enriching the experience of reading with their own expectations, culture, personal memories, and desires.[12] Stories are often made richer by what they do not tell: omissions invite imagination to be active and fertile.

As Paul Auster vividly explains, "The text is no more than a springboard for the imagination. 'Once upon a time there was a girl who lived with her mother in a house at the edge of a large wood.' You don't know what the girl looks like, you don't know what color the house is, you don't know if the mother is tall or short, fat or thin, you know next to nothing. But the mind won't allow these things to remain blank; it fills in the details itself, it creates images based on its own memories and experiences — which is why these stories resonate so deeply inside us. The listener becomes an active participant in the story" (Auster 1993:

[10] Objectual imagining is therefore always characterized by indeterminateness: "To imagine an object *as* determinate is to imagine it as possessing the higher-order property stated, that of possessing a determinate property for each of its determinables. There is a world of difference, then, between *imagining an object as determinate*—as possessing determinates for each of its determinables—and *determinately imagining it—specifying* in each case what the underlying determinate is. What I have been urging is that objectual imagining is determinate in the first sense but not in the second" (Yablo 1993: 28).

[11] Following what Bergson [1902] says about *dynamic schemas*. In order to explain what they are Bergson choses the example of the memory of a skillful chess player who can play several games of chess at once without looking at the chessboard— what the player has in mind is the function of each piece and his (past-present-future) role in moving them: then at every move the chess player makes, he reconstructs the history of that specific game from the beginning, thus obtaining a representation of the whole process. The dynamic schema is therefore a dynamic outline of temporal relations which is developable into multiple images.

[12] Ingarden explains that "every literary work is in principle incomplete and always in need of further supplementation; in terms of the text, however, this supplementation can never be completed" ([1965] 1973: 251); cf. also Smith (1979) who underlines how ontological incompleteness is at the basis of the most important and radical difference between real and literary individuals.

304). So the activity of reading results from the cooperation between reader and writer: while completing what is written down the first recreates (or better, tries to recreate) that world the second has just sketched on the page. Readers fill out what is ontologically incomplete by conceiving (imagining, understanding) it *as if* it were complete:

> [D]uring his reading and his aesthetic appreciation of the work, the reader usually goes beyond what is simply presented by the text (or projected by it) and in various respects *completes* the represented objectivities, so that at least some of the spots of indeterminacy are removed […] the literary work itself is to be distinguished from its respective concretizations, and not everything that is valid for the concretization of the work is equally valid for the work itself. […] one and the same literary work can allow any number of concretizations, which frequently differ significantly from the work itself and also, in their content, differ significantly among themselves. (Ingarden [1965] 1973: 252)

This explains why from a single schematized object we can derive different concretizations and why, even if we can have many concretizations of a literary work, none of them can be considered as *being/consisting in* the work itself: because the ontology of the literary work is such that it can always be determinate further on.

Insisting on the distinction between literary work and its concretizations does not mean to deny the possibility of a genuine access to the work in itself, but rather to defend the peculiar ontological structure of literary objects which are essentially *schematic*: even if their constitutive spots of indeterminacy may be fulfilled time after time, their very identity is never threatened. This also explains why such objects fail to satisfy the law of the excluded middle, i.e., why it is true both that they have p and that they have non-p, when they are not determined for what concerns p.

> If, e.g., a story begins with the sentence: 'An old man was sitting at a table', etc., it is clear that the represented 'table' is indeed a 'table' and not, for example a 'chair'; but whether it is made of wood or iron, is four-legged or three-legged, etc., is left quite unsaid and therefore—this being a purely intentional object—*not determined*. The material of its composition is altogether unqualified, although it must be some material. Thus, in the given object, its qualification is *totally absent*: there is an 'empty' spot here, a 'spot of indeterminacy'. As we have said, such empty spots are impossible in the case of a real object. At most, the material may, for example, be unknown. (Ingarden [1965] 1973: 249)

Specifically insisting on this qualification/determination activity in which lies part of the interaction between text and reader, Wolfgang Iser (1972) presents his phenomenological theory of reader-response. Following Ingarden, he describes the act of reading as consisting in the reader's concretization of textual features, a gap-filling activity stimulated by the structural indeterminacies of the text. The *implied*

*reader*[13] therefore is a text-based reader and the reading process entails the generation of meanings already inscribed in the text.[14]

As Iser himself remarks when reading novels the reader has to imaginatively work in order to visualize what he has read, whereas when watching films his experience starts with the physical perception of the concretization of someone's else (the film's director). That is why, in comparison with being engaged with books, being engaged with films is imaginatively less demanding: there are less elements of indeterminacy, i.e., less gaps our imagination is required to fill.[15]

## *IV.*

Another quite natural (but no less powerful) question concerns the practice of reading and the way it is carried out: does the speed at which we read affect our appreciation? In order to imagine vividly and richly what the text says as well as what it does not, do we need more time? If so, this would explain why, especially for literary masterpieces, slow reading or even re-reading often does help. As Vladimir Nabokov stated in his *Lectures on Literature*,

> Curiously enough, one cannot read a book: one can only reread it. A good reader, a major reader, an active and creative reader is a rereader. And I shall tell you why. When we read a book for the first time the very process of laboriously moving our eyes from left to right, line after line, page after page, this complicated physical work upon the book, the very process of learning in terms of space and time what the book is about, this stands between us and artistic appreciation. When we look at a painting we do not have to move our eyes in a special way even if, as in a book, the picture contains elements of depth and development. The element of time does not really enter in a first contact with a painting. In reading a book, we must have time to acquaint ourselves with it. We have no physical organ (as we have the eye in regard to a painting) that takes in the whole picture and then can enjoy its details. But at a second, or third, or fourth reading we do, in a sense, behave towards a book as we do towards a painting. However, let us not confuse the physical eye, that monstrous masterpiece of evolution, with the mind, an even more monstrous achievement. A book, no matter what it is—a work of fiction or a work of science (the boundary line between the two is not as dear as is generally believed)—a book of fiction appeals first of all

[13] The difference between an *implied* reader and an *actual* reader becomes apparent when having to do with literary works written in a period when conventional values were very different. The implied reader has to do with the way in which the text structures answers, points of view, interpretations, and indeterminacies requiring a regular completing activity.

[14] Iser's proposal sounds circular since the concept of the reader is deduced from the (text) theory and the reader's activity just confirms this hypothesis.

[15] Concerning "filling the gaps" and "concretizing schematic objects", actually Ingarden and Iser are merely stating the problem, but not offering any solution to it. This is the issue concerning what is "truth in fiction", which has exercised analytic philosophers for much time, it is enough to think to D. Lewis and his possible words (1978), K. Walton and authorized games of make-believe (1990), and more recent K. Stock's strong intentionalism (2017).

> to the mind. The mind, the brain, the top of the tingling spine, is, or should be, the only instrument used up in a book. (Nabokov [1980] 1983: 3–4)

This is a feature characterizing reading literature that might not be easy to understand: whereas few would question admiring Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* many times or watching Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* again and again, some would probably find strange the act of rereading Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* three or four times. Why "wasting time" rereading something of which we remember the plot, many parts in detail, and entire quotes? Actually in rereading what we usually experience is the paradox of the simultaneous *sameness* and *difference* of that very experience. How is it possible that the words are the same but our perceptions of them seem different? And why quite often rereadings are *better* readings? This last question sounds even more odd. Nabokov has an answer for it: once the physical and hard job on the text is over, artistic appreciation can start thanks to memory (we need remember the different parts of the novel in order to grasp it as a whole), imagination and aesthetic distance (or, as Kant (1790) would say, the disinterested approach which is necessary for aesthetic judgment and pleasure). These three ingredients are the ones characteristically fundamental in order to gain the attention of reading—which is not the mere deciphering symbols on the page or the act of identifying ourselves with characters:

> There are, however, at least two varieties of imagination in the reader's case. So let us see which one of the two is the right one to use in reading a book. First, there is the comparatively lowly kind which turns for support to the simple emotions and is of a definitely personal nature. […] A situation in a book is intensely felt because it reminds us of something that happened to us or to someone we know or knew. Or, again, a reader treasures a book mainly because it evokes a country, a landscape, a mode of living which he nostalgically recalls as part of his own past. Or, and this is the worst thing a reader can do, he identifies himself with a character in the book. This lowly variety is not the kind of imagination I would like readers to use.
>
> So what is the authentic instrument to be used by the reader? It is impersonal imagination and artistic delight. What should be established, I think, is an artistic harmonious balance between the reader's mind and the author's mind. We ought to remain a little aloof and take pleasure in this aloofness while at the same time we keenly enjoy—passionately enjoy, enjoy with tears and shivers—the inner weave of a given masterpiece. (Nabokov [1980] 1983: 4)

Needless to say, rereading—while exploring carefully the text and identifying in it different aspects, perspectives and saliences under renewed attention to detail—helps for aesthetic appreciation, supports literary evaluation and stimulates the process of interpretation (the reconstruction of content and the search for wider significance). It is not by chance indeed that rereading is at the hearth of the practice of literary criticism.

Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon in *Psychonarratology* (2003) convincingly explain how the activity of reading takes place and also what

happens during rereading by analysing data experiments. This conveys them to realize how those texts characterised by high complexity, rich vocabulary and refined literary style, require more time and effort to be processed, and also how this major deal of concentration induces more pleasure in readers during their second reading. In a similar way Shuwei Xue, Arthur M. Jacobs and Jana Lüdtke (2020) adopt the rereading approach to analyze poetic texts by using both indirect online (eye tracking) and direct offline methods (forms and marking tasks), testing whether readers' reactions to Shakespearian sonnets are different on a first and second reading, coming to the conclusion that evaluative responses to high literary texts rise on a second reading, where we "find out why certain writers endure" (as observes Prose 2006).[16]

## *V.*

The very first step for reading is the one where the decoding process is involved, i.e., the one making people get acquainted with string letters and their meaning, thus getting access to the text, whereas the further steps are those thanks to which people reflect on formal linguistic construction and literary genres, implementing in the meanwhile imagination and interpretation processes.

Now ask: is it reasonable to practice imagining (as we practice, for instance, drawing) to imagine better? And how to contextualize this question in our lives characterized by a continuum of image-bombing? Are our imaginations somehow impoverished or threatened? Italo Calvino notoriously displays a similar worry in the fourth of his *Six Memos for the Next Millenium* [1988], *Visibility*:

> If I have included visibility in my list of values to be saved, it is to give warning of the danger we run in losing a basic human faculty: the power of bringing visions into focus with our eyes shut, of bringing forth forms and colors from the lines of black letters on a white page, and in fact of *thinking* in terms of images. (Calvino [1988] 1996: 92)

Thinking in terms of images allows us to have big and small joys (not only intellectual), not only such as when we read a novel but also as when we entertain ourselves, perhaps even lull ourselves, with those products of imagination which, no matter how big or small, distract us from reality, even if often (too often, unfortunately) they never come true. We practice imagining every time we try to change our own's perspective, we put ourselves in someone else's shoes, we imagine something for the first time, we represent ourselves an entity or a specific situation, or either when we envision some sort of experience we aren't having. Our imaginative training is therefore also strengthened through the experience of reading—that invites people specifically to imagine (propositionally, objectually, simulatively) to get access to the

[16] Similar findings are reported by Hakemulder (2004), Zyngier, Van Peer and Hakemulder (2007), and Hakemulder and Kuijpers (2018).

complexity of the work. And, just like any training, the more it is practiced, the better the results will be. Therefore, despite Calvino's fear, we still imagine what we read and printed words are a sort of a playing field for our imaginative activity.

What is interesting indeed is also that our imagination, however dynamic, will never be able to complete what is essentially incomplete (as Ingarden has extensively explained, however accurate, our imaginative completion will always be partial, subjective, and linked to the specific space-time coordinates of the appreciation; that's why even re-reading many times the same text we will always add something or we will imagine it differently from previous times). "We can say that […] every literary work is in principle incomplete and always in need of further supplementation; in terms of the text, however, this supplementation can never be completed."[17] From an *ontological point of view* literary individuals, places and events are underdetermined, whereas real ones are determined. *Pace* Brian Davis whose project *The Composites* is based on the idea of doing with literary characters what the police does with composite portraits of criminals—an idea doomed to failure because whereas our imagination tries to fill up the gaps, the software works differently, reproducing nothing but incomplete objects (actually the final result of the software is very different from what we find, for example, in a movie).[18] The failure of Davis's project shows why literary characters cannot be assimilated to real people: first of all because they do not exist (an element that should not be underestimated, since the software in question were designed to find real people), and secondly, because they are incomplete, i.e., they are not determined about all properties. And while non-existence and incompleteness may be problematic features from one point of view (just think of how many ontological and logical concerns they gave to Bertrand Russell), from another they are the reason why these creatures are so mysterious and irresistible. It is precisely because they do not exist and are incomplete that they tickle our imagination so much. We will never be able to identify them, find them, and meet them out there. After all, that is the beauty of characters in novels: the fact that they are not real, so they can be imagined and completed at will with the help of imagination. Hence no software can give Anna Karenina a face, our help is needed (even if, as we have seen, it is still not enough to arrive to get Anna Karenina's face, because actually, she has essentially *no* determinate face). Always and forever. We need to imagine by ourselves and in the meanwhile also interpret what we read trying to grasp the author's descriptive intentions.

When describing Aleksei Aleksandrovich Karenin—by adopting Anna's viewpoint—Tolstoy writes:

[17] B. Smith (1979: 251) underlines that ontological incompleteness is the most important and radical difference between real and fictional individuals.

[18] https://www.brianjosephdavis.com/the-composites

> At Petersburg, as soon as the train stopped and she got out, the first person who attracted her attention was her husband. 'Oh, my God, why do his ears look like that?' she thought, looking at his frigid and distinguished figure, and especially at the cartilage that struck her at the moment as propping up the brim of his round hat. Catching sight of her, he came to meet her, his lips falling into their habitual mocking smile, and his big tired eyes looking straight at her. An unpleasant sensation gripped at her heart when she met his obstinate and weary glance, as though she had expected to see him different. She was especially struck by the feeling of dissatisfaction with herself that she experienced on meeting him. That feeling was an intimate, familiar feeling, like a consciousness of hypocrisy, which she experienced in her relations with her husband. But hitherto she had not taken note of that feeling, and now she was clearly and painfully aware of it. (Tolstoy [1877] 1930: 110)

The physical description of Karenin's ears is particularly interesting because what we, as readers, should know, is that surely Karenin's ears *have not changed at all*. And how do we know that? We know Tolstoy's novel is realistic (cf. Walton 1970—we know the specific literary genre *Anna Karenina* belongs to) and in fact, human ears do not grow overnight (differently from hairs and beard). So, how are we to understand and imagine Karenin's look? What about his ears? What has then changed? Simply Anna herself. Actually, returning from Moscow where she has met Vronsky, she is a different person from the one who has left: she has fallen in love—that's why she takes notice of that particular physical feature in her dispassionate and dry husband. From that moment on, Anna will consider her husband no longer as a man but just as a big pair of ears: needless to say, this sort of dehumanization helps Anna justify her acting and her extramarital liaison.

This is a point that can be grasped only by a reader that far for simply deciphering what is written down, tries to imagine by following the author's intentional use of language.[19] Therefore no surprise for that attentive reader (he has been prepared) when he bumps in Anna's thought referring to Karenin: "Love? Can he love? If he hadn't heard there was such a word as love, he would never have used the word. He doesn't even know what love is" (Tolstoy [1877] 1930: 156). Of course, a pair of ears does not know what love is.

The text needs the reader to gain its meaning: only when the trained eye gets attentively in contact with those black signs on the page the

[19] One could argue whether there is any difference under this specific point of view between the reading activity and everyday communication where people are required to pay attention to the details, to grasp hidden meanings in utterances, to individuate the speaker's intentions, and so on. Notoriously, a strong parallel between literature and conversation is the one defended by Carroll (1992) who maintains that in conversations we typically aim at understanding the intentions of our interlocutors, and in a very similar way happens during our "conversations" with literary artworks. Dickie and Wilson (1995) raised some objections challenging Carroll's supposition that conversations and works of art, as far as intended meaning is concerned, are to be considered as analogous. This is an extremely important point, but it would take us too far from the main topic of this paper.

text does acquire its fullness. This sort of cooperation required by literary texts makes them unique in the broader domain of artworks: paintings ask us to look at them nearer or to keep distance, statues make us walk around them, vases and other small artistic objects are turned and touched while handled with care—but they all remain *external* to us, other than us, and no actual entry into them by us is allowed. Books invite us, as readers, to imagine what the author has written. This also explains why Kafka wrote to the publisher of his *Metamorphosis* that the insect itself shouldn't be depicted on the cover: because he wanted to preserve his readers' imaginative acts.[20] Literary works—even if under a certain point of view (the one according to which they are physical objects) can be considered as being similar to paintings, statues and objects one can buy and put on a shelf—are in their very essence more similar to fortresses. Neuropsychological research has explained us how to get the keys to get in, philosophy has showed us what happens once inside, which stairs and corridors could be taken, which windows could be opened, what might happen as far as we proceed, what would be the difference between climbing those steps or some others, and how much strength is required in order to visit them properly. This is literature: the castle in which to enter, inhabit, perhaps even conquer, in the awareness that, as readers, we will never really succeed in our intention, and yet we will never stop trying.

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[20] Of course there remains also another option, the one according to which since visualizing demands a big effort on the part of the reader, the reader may choose to resist the pictorial in favor of the conceptual.

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# *Book Review*

## *Rafe McGregor,* Literary Criminology and Literary Criticism*, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022, 144 pp.*

In his new book, *Literary Criminology and Literary Criticism*, Rafe McGregor argues for a new methodology of critical criminology[1] that he calls *criminological criticism*. The features of criminological criticism are exploring the significance and value of allegories in narrative works of art, establishing a theoretical framework using Vidmar Jovanović's conception of fictional testimony (Vidmar and Baccarini 2010, Vidmar 2015, 2017), requesting collaboration between critical criminologists and literary critics, and focusing on narrative works of art as actual interventions in social reality. McGregor demonstrates the main aspect of criminological criticism (examining allegories) by exploring three narrative works of art: George Miller's feature film *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), Prime Video's television series *Carnival Row* (2019) and J.K. Rowling's novel *The Cuckoo's Calling* (2013).

McGregor starts with an anecdote which explains his motivation for writing the book. He recalls being at a conference where each participant's contribution was referred to as an "intervention" and states that "… no one at the conference was actually doing anything that was going to make a difference to the life of anyone who wasn't in the audience" (1–2). He goes on to explain "… I do think that academics who study literature (whatever their discipline) should do more with their research than find interesting things to say about wonderful books that only a tiny percentage of the global population will ever read" (2).

In the second chapter, McGregor presents two essential tools for his criminological criticism: fourfold allegories (Jameson 2019) and extra-representational capacity (Gibson 2018). Fourfold allegory is an idea that every text or representation contains in itself four levels of meaning: the literal, the symbolic, the existential and the anthropic. The literal meaning is the representation of the sequence of events in the narrative. The symbolic meaning is hidden in the narrative representation and can be decoded with careful examination of the text. The existential meaning involves individual desire and the construction of subjectivity and is best understood as the ethical meaning of the narrative representation. The anthropic meaning involves the political unconscious and is best understood as the political meaning of the narrative representation. According to

[1] Critical criminology is a sub-discipline of criminology that focuses on issues of social harm and social justice.

McGregor, fourfold allegories correspond to the four values that we get from narrative arts—aesthetic value, cognitive value, ethical value and political value. The second tool McGregor presents is extra-representational capacity. Extra-representational capacity is best understood as an action by an artist to illuminate the important moral and ethical issues in our world. It emerges when we (the reader, the audience or the theorist) engage with the work through fourfold allegories and treat an allegory as an object. Extra-representational capacity should "… contrast our degraded world with a world worth having and then compel the audience to acknowledge the space between the two worlds" (19). The example McGregor uses to demonstrate extra-representational capacity, borrowing from Gibson (2018), is Kafka's *The Trial*.

In the third chapter, McGregor uses the film *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) to discuss hegemonic masculinity, gender cooperation and radical feminist governance. *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) is a post-apocalyptic action film that follows Max (a drifting loner) and Furiosa (a rebellious war captain) as they try to escape the pursuit of the film's antagonists—Immortan Joe and the War Boys – across the post-apocalyptic dessert known only as the Wasteland. According to McGregor, Immortan Joe, the War Boys and the social structure of the Citadel allegorically represent hegemonic masculinity. Perspectival narrative switching between Max and Furiosa and their reluctant cooperation allegorically represent gender cooperation. The last scene in the film where Furiosa ascends literally and figuratively to take control of the Citadel while Max leaves in the crowd represents the possibility of radical feminist governance. McGregor argues that the film enables us to envision a better and more just society in which women and men are truly equal.

In the fourth chapter, McGregor uses the television series *Carnival Row* (2019) to discuss racism, alienation and urban revanchism. *Carnival Row* (2019) is a fantasy series set in the imaginary city of Burgue in which mythical creatures (predominantly the Fae), after having fled their war-torn country, try to coexist with the native human population. The issues of racism, alienation and decivilization are depicted in the relationship between humans and the Fae. Humans generally treat the Fae as morally lesser beings through discrimination, decivilization and systemic and individual violence. McGregor argues that the series enables us to see more clearly the racism and discrimination in our own world.

In chapter five, McGregor uses the novel *The Cuckoo's Calling* (2013) to discuss elitism, class structure and celebrity culture. *The Cuckoo's Calling* (2013) is a crime fiction novel that follows the private investigator Cormoran Strike who is hired by John Bristow to investigate the possible murder of his sister, supermodel and celebrity Lula Landry, which the police ruled as suicide. According to McGregor, the issue of class structure is explored through the character of Cormoran Strike, the issue of celebrity culture through the character of Lula Landry and the issue of elitism in the way society treats both. Strike's class condition, a particular position in the distribution of material properties and symbolic capital, is a mixed bag. He is the son of a famous rock star, he went to Oxford and failed to graduate, likes beer, takeaway meals and football, but socializes with government ministers and aristocrats. Despite all these characteristics, people of a higher

economic and social status think less of him. Lula, despite becoming an overnight celebrity and multi-millionaire, struggles with the pressure of being a celebrity, which includes lack of anonymity and coping with mental problems. Notwithstanding these troubles, people still consider Lula to be a spoiled rich girl who suffers from "first world problems". McGregor argues that the novel "…provides convincing explanations of the constituents of class condition, the impact of celebrity culture, and the harm of elitism at its symbolic, existential, anthropic levels of meanings respectively" (72).

Building on his previous chapters, in chapter six McGregor argues that we can use works of narrative arts as legitimate and reliable epistemic sources to discover causes of social harm and social injustice in the real world. To make his point, McGregor relies on Vidmar Jovanović's conception of fictional testimony. Vidmar Jovanović's idea is that fictional testimony is not so different from real testimony. Even though Vidmar Jovanović recognizes that there are obvious differences between fictional testimony and real testimony, she argues that similarities between the two are present and relevant. In both kinds of testimony, we have an informant and a listener (or an author and a reader) and the listener can learn something if the informant is reliable and sincere. McGregor argues that this theory explains how criminologists can use narrative works of art as epistemic sources for their investigations.

In the penultimate chapter, McGregor argues for collaboration between critical criminologists and literary critics, calling this collaboration the critical criminologist. The critical criminologist investigation consists of several steps. First, she needs to draw on her knowledge of the discipline to discover whether the idea, argument, hypothesis or theory that she has is original. Second, she needs to assess whether the theory or hypothesis can be tested. McGregor offers an example: *The fear of crime plays a more substantial role than the actual crime rate in social disintegration* (102). Despite obvious difficulties, McGregor is adamant that these kinds of theories can be empirically tested. Lastly, when the theory is tested it can become available as a public policy.

In the conclusion, McGregor reiterates the benefits of his criminological criticism and emphasizes the need for "… synergy between the social sciences and the humanities to create a policy output that constitutes a genuine positive intervention in social reality" (104).

To conclude, I believe the book is well written and concisely structured. Additionally, it is an absolute joy to read. McGregor clearly explains complex concepts like extra-representational capacity and fourfold allegories. The narrative examples are fun and engaging while also serving a vital argumentative purpose. McGregor works within the argumentative framework from critical criminology, literary criticism and analytic philosophy. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in new and fresh ideas from these domains.*

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